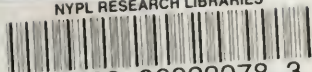


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# EXPLORATIO EVANGELICA



# EXPLORATIO EVANGELICA

A BRIEF EXAMINATION

OF THE

BASIS AND ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

BY

PERCY GARDNER, LITT. D.

Le déplacement du christianisme de la région historique dans la région psychologique est le vœu de notre époque.—H. F. AMIEL.

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## PREFACE

IT is perhaps due to readers of this book that I should here enter into a brief explanation of its purport, and the conditions under which it is written. It is essentially the work of a layman. The writer has felt acutely the stress of the revived interest in the problems of theology and religion which marks our age and country. And having, in the quieter intervals of a life mainly devoted to the study of ancient history and archaeology, arrived at certain views in regard to the psychology and the history of religion, he has by degrees thrown some of these views into the form of a treatise on the origin of Christianity. He speaks for himself alone, having no claim to represent a school, either at Oxford or elsewhere.

The present work cannot fairly be called destructive ; nor is it primarily constructive, but rather critical. It may perhaps most appropriately be compared to the operations which precede construction, to the investigation of the ground and the digging of trenches with a view to foundations. It is of the nature of Prolegomena. Hence it is written for students ; and I have not tried to make its style attractive ; I have aimed only at clearness and precision. In a field so imperfectly lighted and so full of pitfalls it is a gain if one can move at all.

Hence the title *Exploratio Evangelica*. In college days I owed much to a work by Professor John Grote called *Exploratio Philosophica*, an attempt to feel a way towards philosophic

truth along certain lines. Some of the qualities of Grote's work, impartiality, candour, the determination neither to exaggerate nor to undervalue, have marked more recent philosophic work at Cambridge; and I have tried to preserve these qualities in the present book. It is in the truest sense an *exploratio*, no exposition of a ready-made creed, no attempt to fix some new scheme of doctrine, but a psychologic and historic investigation of the origins of Christianity, partly with a view to the possibilities of belief among the new surroundings of our times. It is in no self-confident spirit, but after many shrinkings and hesitations, that I publish it. No one can feel more acutely the limitations of the author than does the author himself. The scheme of the book is necessarily so large that scarcely any one writer could work it out with real mastery. But friends assure me that it is no small compensation for all defects that I am able to approach theological subjects with some practice in history and archæology, and without visible bias. My daily work and my means of living are in no way connected with the acceptance of this or that system of belief. A layman's only excuse for writing about religion is that he finds the subject of absorbing interest, and that he is able to survey the history of religion with faculties trained in other fields of observation. Mr. A. C. Headlam observes in a recent work, "A mind trained in an archæological method will be trained to interpret a book historically, and not to use it controversially." If my acquaintance with the history of Christianity is mainly confined to the first two centuries of our era, this at any rate removes one of the principal causes of bias in theological writers, who necessarily have a tendency to read the earliest Christian history in the light of later developments.

It has been necessary to confine my work to a small part of the field of religion. To begin with I have dealt only with Christianity, and with other religions as influencing it. Almost the whole of Hellenic religion, in which I have a



special interest, is thus shut out, as well as Buddhism and Islam. And in speaking of Christianity, I have been obliged to confine myself to its creed, and to leave aside all questions of ritual and art, of organisation and discipline. I have also felt it necessary to confine my investigation almost entirely to the first century of Christian history. I would ask readers to judge my work by what it contains rather than by what it does not contain. As it is, I have trespassed with imperfect knowledge into many fields; and I can only ask the specialists in possession of those fields to pardon a presumption which was necessary, from my point of view if not from theirs.

It may be convenient to readers that I should briefly indicate to what schools of thought I owe most. By birth and training an Evangelical Christian, I became at Cambridge a pupil of Maurice. But though I have greatly valued converse with him and with many other distinguished theologians, I have been on the whole more influenced by books than by men. In the field of psychology I am Kantian or Neo-Kantian, with a special debt to Mill and to Mansel. In the field of anthropology I owe most to Robertson Smith and Dr. Tylor. As regards the early history of Christianity, I have tried to follow the best writers, such as Harnack, Lightfoot, the Révilles, and Schürer. For many years the writings of Auguste Comte exercised a great influence over me, both in the way of attraction and of repulsion. Convictions as to the great importance of criticism in religious matters I owe to Matthew Arnold, in my opinion the greatest critic of our age. Since this book was written, I have been delighted to find in how many psychologic views I agree with Prof. Sabatier of Paris, and in how many with Prof. W. James of Harvard.

The general tendency of this book is to transfer the burden of support of Christian doctrine from history to psychology, perhaps rather from the history of facts to the history of ideas. There is great truth in Amiel's saying, "What our age

especially needs is a translation of Christianity from the domain of history to the domain of psychology." Much the same view was expressed by Mr. Jowett in the words, "Religion is not dependent on historical events, the report of which we cannot altogether trust. Holiness has its sources elsewhere than in history."

To make an index to a work of this kind is almost an impossibility. In place of attempting the impossible, I have given in the last chapter a brief summary of the whole book, with reference to chapters. This will serve also as a detailed table of contents.

I have to acknowledge personal help in dealing with proofs from Mr. Estlin Carpenter, Mr. Vernon Bartlet, and my sister, Miss Alice Gardner. Of course none of these friends is responsible for any statement in the book.

PERCY GARDNER.

OXFORD, *September* 1899.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PRESENT STATE OF RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE

EVERY form of religious belief has in our days to submit to new and severe tests. The spread of scientific methods in every branch of historical science, and the encroachments of criticism, are shaking all the theological views of which the foundation is at all insecure. Like the historical sciences, like economics and philology and archaeology, theology too has to stand the weight of the storm, and it behoves us all to look to our foundations, and to be sure that the doctrinal abodes in which our ancestors dwelt securely are able to resist the severer stress of changed intellectual conditions.

The greater severity of modern historical method tells in three ways principally. First, in a closer criticism of books and of documentary evidence. We have learned to put all documents to severer tests, to regard them with greater suspicion, to be more sceptical in regard to their authenticity and their value. That an ancient writer has a good style and a fine turn for morality no longer suffices to make us accept his statements blindfold. And we now realise to what an immense degree almost all the writers of ancient history have been under the influence of bias.

Secondly, we have imported from the biologic sciences into those which are historic, the profound idea of evolution. Criticism of documents is essentially a destructive process, and as applied to ancient history it might readily lead us to complete agnosticism. But the theory of evolution is constructive.

If we can establish a few fixed points in history, we can now venture to draw the lines of development from one to another of these. Events of the past no longer stand isolated, but are colligated into groups, and so become far more easy to deal with. Yet though the principle of evolution be essentially constructive, it is very destructive of much that has hitherto passed as history. It minimises all that implies non-continuity in history, abolishes cataclysms, sees orderly sequence where before there had appeared only disjointed juxtapositions. It seeks not mere occasions but causes; not mere events but principles. The growth of mankind ceases to resemble the successive scenes of a panorama, and becomes biologic, like the growth of a tree, though of course the working of great personalities in the past must always maintain in history a certain amount of inexplicable variation.

Thirdly, in the writing of history in our days there is far less of bias, of deliberate preference, than there has been hitherto. No doubt a complete absence of bias is practically unattainable, and were it attained the historian would probably be dull beyond dullness. But undoubtedly we at least endeavour to be more judicial. No one now would deem it right to construct a fanciful history of the past on a mere skeleton of fact in order to illustrate a thesis or enforce a moral. Yet this has been a custom among historians. The light and shade in history are becoming less obtrusive, and a gray light of sobriety and moderation is spreading over the scene.

It is sufficiently clear that the introduction of these new customs into the domain of the history of religion must have a subversive effect. In criticising documents we have to begin with the Bible itself, and criticism of the Bible soon leads the critic to somewhat startling views. And in accepting the history of religion as on the whole a fairly continuous development, though marked by crises, we necessarily altogether change our view of the rise of Christianity. We see that it did not spring fully developed from the head of the Founder, but gradually took form, absorbing a number of existing beliefs and tendencies, though it was the spirit of the Founder which drew these together and started them on a changed line of progress.

The result of such changes in the method of historical study is that we soon discover that a great part of the historical substratum which is supposed to support many of the doctrines and beliefs of Christianity is in a ruinous condition. It has become necessary to seek elsewhere than in the supposed facts of ancient history a sufficient foundation for Christian faith.

It is quite clear that the new criticism of the Bible is a greater danger to the Protestant than to the Catholic schools of theology. For the Catholic does not primarily base his religion on the Bible, but on the Church. And the application of the doctrine of development to the history of the Church, however little it may lie in the line of past Catholic teaching, does not seem to be altogether an impossibility. Newman notoriously has attempted it, though with very imperfect success. But any application of the doctrine of development to the Bible necessarily does away with its infallibility and its verbal inspiration. And it was on Scripture that the Protestant schools of theology built their systems. In throwing the Bible into historic perspective modern criticism necessarily changes the original basis of the whole Protestant theology, and compels it to seek for a new foundation.

This would, I think, scarcely be disputed by any one who looked calmly on facts. But mankind have an extraordinary power of declining to see facts which are inconvenient. And it is not only to Pagan but also to Christian belief and custom that the pregnant phrase of Servius applies, "*In sacris simulata pro veris accipi.*" The whole history of Christian beliefs is a history of illusions, of compromises, of half truths taken for whole truths, and outworn doctrines patched to look like new. So the great majority of Protestant theologians, though they have lost their once sufficient and logical basis, contrive to keep together enough of it for a standing ground. In place of the infallibility of Scripture they accept something as like infallibility as gray is like black; in place of verbal inspiration they put inspiration of some other kind or degree which will serve as a working theory.

It would be both presumptuous and foolish to condemn these compromises except from the strictly logical standing ground.



Religion is in the main a matter of conduct, and any theory which will bear a superstructure of honest life and noble deed is, as a working hypothesis, justified. But speaking from the logical point of view only, it seems quite clear that if Scripture is to be the ultimate arbiter in matters of faith and doctrine, Scripture must be taken as the direct word of the Most High. The admission that human frailty and folly have a share in the words of Scripture at once deprives them of the position of a final court of appeal. Even the words of our Lord himself cannot be reasonably regarded as infallible, because they are set down by a fallible reporter, who may have mistaken or garbled them.

It is not strange that the most earnest, and therefore most sincere, of Evangelical theologians have in recent years sought for some authority to supplement, even in some degree to replace, the waning authority of Scripture. Some, like the great Oxford Cardinal, have sought it in the Church of Rome, in which a visible infallible Pope certainly offers a marvellous refuge to those who must have a final authority at any intellectual cost. Other theologians have taken a diametrically opposite course, and despairing altogether of outward authority have sought it within in the recesses of the conscience, or, as they would prefer to say, in communion with Christ in heaven. But such religion suffers from all the dangers of extreme subjectivity and individualism.

The schools of theology which lie between these extremes can scarcely be said to occupy a steadfast position. The energy of the Church of England seems to lie mainly in the High Church section of it. The position of this party, though it includes many admirable men, seems to me weak on the side of history: and what is worse, it has not the support of educated laymen, very few of whom have any sympathy with its theories, and who are indeed year by year more and more giving up the practice of church-going. The orthodox dissenters, many of them very liberal and enlightened, are as a whole too much committed to the infallibility of Scripture to be in a safe position amid the growing stress of historic criticism.

It is notable how modest and apologetic is the tone of many intelligent preachers in church and in chapel. A large



proportion of the discourses one hears are gentle deprecations, arguments to show that the non-religious view of life is not completely satisfactory, or that after all something is to be said for faith and hope. Sometimes arguments against Huxley or Herbert Spencer, who unfortunately are not present to be convinced, take the place of the positive teaching of religion. Surely it is not by any such defensive warfare that the ground which religion has lost among us is to be reconquered. If there be any value or truth in Christianity at all, it can claim more than mere toleration.

In our days there are also many who fancy that it is possible for religion to grow and prosper without any sort of doctrine. Such a notion has prompted the foundation, especially in America, of so-called ethical societies, the members of which think that they may agree in principles of conduct, while differing in philosophic and religious views. Such fancies show imperfect knowledge of the nature of conduct. We may, if we choose, blindly follow the customs of our fathers, or we may follow the fancies of the moment, but if we at all endeavour to think about our conduct, and direct it by some higher law, we must of necessity at once set about framing religious doctrine. Doctrines are principles of action expressed in intellectual form, and no man can have any principles of action and reflect upon them, without holding religious doctrine. It is true that in the fervour of a great religious revival, doctrine may be still in embryo. And it is true that in the presence of a mighty spiritual leader of men, his direct commands may be taken as principles of action, and not expressed in terms of the intellect. But in ordinary times and among thoughtful men, religious doctrine is as necessary to the healthy and normal development of a community as are faith and self-denial. In the expressive language of Matthew Arnold, the Hellenic side of our nature requires satisfaction as well as the Hebraic side, and any non-recognition of this fact tends to a one-sided growth, to fanaticism and excess. Tennyson has given countenance to the prevailing notion in his lines,

There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

And yet Tennyson's creed, short as it was, included the doctrine of personal immortality, a doctrine involving enormous assumptions.

The necessity of a creed in religion is imperative. But its place and its functions are commonly misapprehended. It is usually supposed that doctrines can be and should be intellectually proved; and that those who thus receive them may be expected to carry them out in their lives. This is a radically mistaken view of the relations between knowledge and practice, which has its roots in the teaching of Plato and has descended in unbroken line down to the Utilitarians of our day. Some philosophic schools have always held knowledge to be the source of action, and action the outcome of knowledge. And such may sometimes be the order of things in the case of a very few of the highly educated. But not such is the order among the great mass of men, better and worse. With them impulse and feeling precede alike thought and action.

So in the case of religion. Its ideas and principles are partly inherited, partly received by a sort of contagion from fellowmen, and in part directly revealed to men by the higher Power. And having received in the heart these ideas and principles men have two things to do: first, to act in accordance with them, and, second, to justify them to the intellect. In the course of the second of these processes doctrine is formulated. As feeling cools, doctrine is deposited like crystals. And it is of value, not so much for the direction as for the justification or the testing of conduct. When a man meets his principles of action writ large in the courts of reason, he can better judge whether they are worthy, whether they are suitable to human life, whether they are of divine origin. But the ordinary man, if he starts with the mere intellectual investigation of doctrine, will never be able thence to derive principles of action. He will probably end as a complete sceptic or agnostic, and as one who confesses his life to be directed to no conscious purpose.

Doctrine then, though it does not precede religious ideas, is a necessary corollary of them in the mind of every man who reflects. Every reflecting man must needs endeavour to

put his religious doctrines on terms with the rest of his intellectual furniture. And since in recent years our intellectual furniture has completely changed, the old doctrines find themselves out of place in its midst.

The sickly hue which is spread over the face of modern civilisation arises mainly, as is indeed generally recognised, from the fact that for the time the forces of negation have gained among us the upper hand over those of construction. This state of things has arisen principally from the rapid changes which have taken place in all our surroundings, physical, intellectual and moral. Like the proverbial rolling stone we gather no moss: in fact the strata which should form a solid basis for life and growth are becoming like the banks of pebbles thrown up by the sea on the shore, masses of rounded stones, constantly moving, and giving no foothold to vegetable or animal existence. This condition of the civilised world cannot last very long; we tell ourselves day and night that our time is a time of transition, and so it is undoubtedly. Meantime while we watch for and foster the germs of a new order, we may also endeavour to preserve what is worthy of permanence in the order of the past, yet exists only in a state of progressive dissolution and decay.

The spiritual chaos which has succeeded the cosmos of Christian faith is no isolated phenomenon, but one of a class. It has analogies on all sides. The present is no place for working out these analogies. Yet we may briefly mention some of them as we pass. A confusion not less complete than that of the religious world prevails in art and in politics. In painting, the closer and more accurate observation of nature which is the result of the progress of science, and the invention of photography, have destroyed many of the conventions which made painting attractive and interesting. There are among us a number of artists each with a style of his own, but no generally recognised principles of a really constructive kind. In place of an orderly succession of schools we find an anarchy, where every man maintains himself by the skill of his own hand, while the mass of mankind has ceased to judge works of painting by any recognised standard. In the world of politics also disintegration has proceeded with rapid steps.

Democracy advances every year over the ruins of some old and honoured institution, levelling every inequality, as the sea levels the ramparts which children construct on the sand. Yet many germs of order are appearing. It has been well said that we are now all socialists. And the true meaning of the phrase is that all who reflect see the necessity of some new social organisation based upon a consideration of the general good, to take the place of the organisation of mere traditional privilege which is rapidly passing away. We all are looking eagerly for some refuge from the dead waste of infinite individual competition between men on one level which appears to be the goal of what has passed as political progress.

These analogies are very helpful and suggestive in considering the state of religion, and particularly of religious doctrine among us. The magnificent doctrinal system of the Middle Ages has been undermined, partly by the growth of physical science, which has ruined its supposed basis of known facts as to the world and mankind, and partly by the growth of historic criticism, which has rendered untenable its hold upon the historic documents of Christianity.

Doctrine, being in the main practical or regulative, is based like art and government rather on human feeling and impulse than on mere knowledge. As naturalism destroys art and democracy government, so the growth of science in its two great branches has undermined Christian doctrine as it existed for our forefathers. And there can be no more hope of building a new fabric of religion directly on science than there can be of building art directly on naturalism, or government on equality. One might as well hope to reconstruct a promontory which has been undermined by the sea on the waves which have eaten away its support.

But though doctrine cannot be evolved out of science, yet we may feel sure that any future evolution of doctrine must be able to live in the surroundings produced by science. As all future art must be conditioned by closer knowledge of fact and all future political organisation by the growth of equality, so must doctrine accept science as a permanent controlling condition. Future construction in religion must arise, as construction in religion has arisen in the past, out of the ground

of human necessity, and of divine revelation, which meets it. But the process of building must be governed by the intellectual conditions of the new age.

Our final court of appeal must be fact: that is, the constitution of human nature. Though it is useless to appeal to science for the principles of religion, for those practical ideas which are the impulses of the higher life, yet the pursuit of science is necessary to the formulation of religious doctrine. Inquiry must be made into facts of human nature and the experience of life. If man be naturally inclined to religion and incomplete without it, we have to look into our own hearts, and there, if we can, to watch the rise and growth of the feelings and hopes, the purposes and volitions, with which religion has to do. These are facts which we may observe for ourselves in our own lives, or contemplate in the community in which we dwell, or study as they are written large in the history of the Christian Church. Observation can never give us religious principles; but observation, when religious principles already exist, can guide us in their formulation, in just the same way as when an artist has within him the germs of style, only a study of nature is needed to enable him to embody that style in works of art which the world will learn to admire. Thus a careful study of psychologic fact is an indispensable preliminary to any attempt at reconstruction of religious doctrine. Of all appeals, the appeal to experience is the most legitimate, and in making it we have an advantage over our ancestors, inasmuch as our methods are sounder, our perceptions more accurate, and our field of observation wider. The *Natural History of Religion*, a study of very modern origin, seems to me destined to condition theology in the future far more than in the past, and to take the place, at least in some degree, of the other tests of religious doctrine which time has to some extent invalidated.

Every one in these days is aware that a certain amount of physical exercise and recreation is necessary to a healthy life. Such exercise is best taken in some sport or amusement which is in itself agreeable and directed to some outward end. But suppose that a man grows tired of these sports, becomes indolent and lethargic. It then becomes the business of a



wise physician to point out to him the physical needs which exercise meets. In the same way, so long as any one lives in the healthy life of religion it is well. But when doubt comes to sap the spontaneity of religious activity, then an appeal to the root principles of human nature and the necessities of conduct becomes a necessity.

In all branches of science it is supremely necessary to distinguish between fact and theory. Facts have to be ascertained, in order that on them theories may be constructed. But theories are continually changing; and new views which suit the facts better than the old ones are at once accepted. Theories have a vogue and pass away, and no wise man will accept them save as the best explanation of fact at the moment available. But a fact once really established remains as a basis for new theories for all time.

The misfortune in matters of religion is that fact and theory have not been sufficiently distinguished. Theory has constantly tried to pass itself off as fact, and been so intertwined with fact, that it has been almost impossible to attack the theory without denying the allied fact. Successive generations have maintained the acceptance of certain metaphysical constructions to be necessary to that satisfaction of the religious needs which constitutes salvation.

For those who are content with the doctrinal construction in which they live this book is not written. It is written for those who regard dogmatic religion in our days as in an unsafe condition. I have endeavoured to survey the walls of the doctrinal edifice of religion, and to trace the lines of their foundation. No doubt it will be found that great part of these walls is sound and strong; but until a complete survey has been made, it will not be easy to distinguish the sound from the unsound.

Of course the criticism lies on the surface that the facts of human nature will be variously read in the various schools of psychology and theology. This is true enough. And if I had asserted that the study of the natural history of religion would give us once for all an infallible theology, I should have maintained an absurdity. Human nature differs by race and by temperament; and such differences must always be reflected

in theology, but there may still be agreement within certain limits. Nor are we obliged to rely only on the observations of religious fact made by modern investigators. If this were the case, the sceptic might easily reject our facts as fancies and our observations as dreams. But there lies an appeal to religious history in the past. It is certain that for many hundreds of years our ancestors have been convinced by experience of the solidity of the facts which lie at the basis of religion. Had it been otherwise, religion would have been eliminated by competition. It has survived because it is the fittest, and it has been the fittest because it has conformed to truth as to the nature of God and man.

The general nature of the change which is gradually coming to pass, or sooner or later must take place in our religion, is well summed up by a writer of vivid insight, Amiel, in a single phrase,<sup>1</sup> "*le déplacement du christianisme de la région historique dans la région psychologique est le voeu de notre époque.*" There is a process connected in Germany with the name of Professor Harnack, in France with the school of which M. Sabatier and the Révilles are conspicuous members. It is going on, though in less orderly and systematic fashion, among ourselves. History, we are learning, is a branch of science, and faith is based less on history than on experience. The process will take a long time to complete; but its progress, though slow, is very sure. It must prevail, just as the kindred process which has emancipated physical science from theological preconceptions has prevailed, and it may happen that in neither process will religion suffer real injury. The winter of modern criticism strips the leaves from the fair tree of Christian doctrine, but it does not kill the tree itself; and before long we may perhaps see a new growth of leaves covering that tree brightly again.

It is a commonplace with the historians of religion that the ground originally was prepared for the seeds of Christianity by the spread over all the world of Hellenic or Hellenistic culture, by which a certain uniformity was produced in the minds at least of all educated men. All accepted the principles of Greek philosophy, and thought very much in one manner.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal Intime*, ii. 43.

Thus a universal religion became possible. A similar process, but working in a far more profound and radical fashion, is taking place in our own days. The spread of physical and historic science has brought the minds not only of Europeans and Americans, but of Indians and Japanese, on to a new level. Once more a vast field is being smoothed out in which a common religion may strike its roots. And this field can only be occupied by the religion of Christ. But the religion of the Christian churches has to be greatly changed before it is suited for starting on a new and a brilliant career. The same kind of change must come over it which came over the religion of the first Christian thinkers, when they came forth into the intellectual world of the time, and had to make terms with Greek culture. Nothing more clearly proved the vitality of the early Church than the readiness with which it adapted itself to new intellectual conditions. If the same principle of life still exists in the religion of Christ, it will conquer the world of modern civilisation, as it conquered the world of Greek and Roman culture: but we are only beginning to see the enormous changes which must in the process come over its intellectual expression, and particularly over the received Christian history and doctrine. If anything can help us to forecast those changes, it will be a bird's-eye view of the facts of the origin of Christianity, taken rather from the point of view of a historian than from that of a theologian. This task is attempted with however imperfect success in the present work. As a preliminary, however, we must for a few chapters turn our attention to the psychology of religious doctrine.



## CHAPTER II

### THE INSPIRATION OF CONDUCT

FOR generations the enemies of religion have been in the habit of representing it as a thing outworn, as adapted to the life and the mind of man at a certain stage of his development, but now become an anachronism, destined to follow sacrifices and witchcraft into the lumber-room of history. It is hard to imagine how these theorists can account for the persistent life which, as a matter of fact, religion shows, and its inveterate habit of continually renewing its energy and vitality after periods of sloth and decline. For they cannot accept the only view which satisfactorily accounts for these periodical revivals and this persistent vitality: the view that religion is based upon experience, and renews its life by the constant contact with fact.

If any value attaches to testimony, religious experience is as real a thing as experience in any other field. Of course men are very apt, in religion, as in other matters, to draw false inferences from their experience; wherever the feeble reasoning powers of men come in, there is abundant risk of error. But those who reject the experience as chimerical because they do not like the conclusions usually drawn from that experience, act in an unscientific fashion.

The materialist schools have often been guilty of such hasty and unsound procedure. Twenty years ago the authorities of the medical schools of France denied the existence of such a thing as hypnotism. Probably no one now disputes the reality of the phenomena included under that term, though

of course there may be the widest differences of opinion as to what is implied in the phenomena. I would not, of course, save for purposes of illustration, compare the facts of the religious life, the noblest field of human experience, with the morbid phenomena of hypnotism. But if even these latter deserve, as facts, some degree of attention, how utterly unreasonable are the theorists who would exclude from their system of the universe facts which, in this country at least, make up a very large part of the history of human life.

Our psychology has greatly suffered, like other branches of knowledge, from setting aside phenomena which are not easily investigated, and which impede one's theories. In fact, there are whole realms of psychical phenomena, which, until lately, were disregarded, and which are now more often visited by the charlatan than the scientific inquirer. Of all that lies below consciousness, and is the ground of it, we know even now very little. Consciousness is like the surface of the sea, where alone are the ways of commerce, while the vast and silent depths below are scarcely visited by man. Yet the substance which is at one moment at the surface of the sea, may presently be far below that surface. There are all sorts of sympathies, and of mysterious lines of connection between spirit and spirit which we have but begun to track out. And there is a possible and an actual communion between man and the higher powers, which is so little understood, that the best truth in regard to it must be sought, not in the books of science, but in the works of religion and of poetry. Spiritual facts exist all around and above us; but the knowledge of them is not yet at what Comte called the positive stage; it is still theologic and metaphysic, and may long remain so. One might be tempted even to wish that no attempt should be made to map out this region more definitely, but for the strongly marked tendency of modern science to set aside all that cannot be observed and verified: a tendency which compels those who value the deeper aspects of life to try, however reluctantly, to put them on some sort of terms with the more obvious aspects.

The experiences of religion as we find them in the civilised world are of cultivated stock, and we should try in vain to find

more than the rudiments of them among savages and barbarians. They are not, however, for that reason less real and trustworthy. A cultivated rose belongs to nature as much as a wild rose, and a horse as much as a hipparion. Unless we suppose that savagery is the only state natural to man, and all civilisation a declension from that state, we are bound to regard the faculties and feelings of civilised man as based on nature.

In the present chapter I propose to proceed psychologically rather than through history or anthropology. It would be possible to trace back the facts of which I have to speak to earlier forms among the more backward races of mankind, or among the children of the civilised. But a consideration of religion as a factor of human history is reserved for future chapters. At present we are considering its working as it may be witnessed in modern days on all sides of us. In the present work religion is regarded as inextricably bound up with ethics. The non-ethical elements which belong to very early religion have a tendency to disappear with time, and are not important for our present purpose. At present we shall investigate the consciousness of developed man, and leave to other occasions the inquiry how man became what he is.

Every action of man has an outer and an inner side, the side which shows in the world of sense, and the side which belongs to consciousness. To the outer world man belongs as a body occupying space, and as a centre of force. To the inner world he belongs as an ethical being, who has power to act in this way or that, and who, by the action, forms character.

This contrast is familiar enough to all who reflect. We may illustrate it by taking a simple event, say a shipwreck. Taking this in its outer aspect, an observer will say that the violent action of wind, and wave, and rock on the framework of a ship entirely accounts for the destruction of the vessel, and of those within it. The physicist, speaking as such, will say that the event is intelligible and could not under the circumstances be otherwise. The physicist who is determined to explain everything on physical methods will say that he sees in the occurrence nothing but blind forces which care nothing for human life and suffering. But a reasonable man

will distinguish. He will allow that the physical and outward aspect of the event is simple; but he will not fail to observe that in the history of every person on board, the shipwreck is not merely an outward event, but a moral crisis leading to good or evil, to happiness or misery, to the raising or degradation of the life of each person there. This new and added side to the event has nothing in it contrary to the laws of nature, for it takes place in a region above and outside of those unvarying laws which we suppose to hold in the physical universe.

I have taken an instance in which an event looked at from outside seems a result of rigid law, but looked at from inside bears the look of purpose and meaning. We may also take a case which is almost the reverse of this, of an event which, looked at outwardly, seems fortuitous, but from within seems rigidly determined by law. Indeed most conduct has this character. Even where our most intimate friends are concerned we cannot tell from outside with accuracy what line they will take in a difficult case where two duties seem to conflict, and one must be given up for the other. To observation, the future action of A or B is often as doubtful as anything can be in the world, and we are inclined to say that here, if anywhere, uncertainty is supreme and any unvarying law invisible. But A or B, looking at the same matter from within, may feel with conviction, not indeed that only one course is physically possible, but that only one is to him morally possible; that to act otherwise would be self-destruction, and that even to hesitate is unhealthy and wrong. The inward law is of quite a different character from outward law, but it is equally above caprice. It is moral, not physical, yet none the less woven into the constitution of the world.

When a man has become accustomed to the contemplation of this inner life, he soon recognises its fundamental facts. In the outer world of sense and of action, the contrast lies between two elements: on the one side the perceiving, acting, living self, on the other the facts of the visible world. Life in the world consists in a constant adjustment of these two elements. We gain our ends, or they are frustrated; we learn facts as to the nature of surrounding objects and build those facts into an orderly world of phenomena.

In the inner world there is also a fundamental contrast, that between the soul and God, between our will and a higher will, between what is and what ought to be. In consciousness we learn to realise the presence of a Power as much greater than our soul as the forces of the material world are greater than the forces of our bodies. This Power has been spoken of in many ways. In a loyal adhesion to this Power the spiritual life consists. It is the study of our relations with this Power which makes up our religious knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Setting aside naturalistic and pantheistic religions, all those which are of ethical cast centre in the belief in a Higher Power revealed in consciousness and acting on will, feeling, and thought; on will in the first place, since religion is a matter rather of conduct than either of feeling or speculation; yet loyalty of will to the higher impulse raises the range of feeling, and even clears away mists from the eyes of the mind. It is from the kind of relationship which they establish with this Higher Power that the great religions take their tone. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity alike are intensely conscious of the relation of God to the heart, but to each, different sides of the Deity are revealed. The most fundamental of all truths in regard to the Higher Power is that it makes within us for righteousness, and if we will but subordinate ourselves leads us to goodness and to happiness.

In the daily life of ordinary people it does not seem that there is a moral element in every action. We should be disposed to regard those who bring conscience into all their actions as suffering from hypertrophy of that organ; and as applied to ordinary men and women this diagnosis might be justifiable, although the great moral heroes, those who permanently raise the level of life, do look upon even actions in themselves trivial as having ethical elements. But in the lives of all men there come times when they clearly see the lines of good and evil diverging before them, and know that the next step will have momentous consequences upon the whole future, that they must at once and irrevocably begin either to climb or to sink, since every action leaves its mark

<sup>1</sup> The psychological groundwork of religion is treated in greater detail in a work published by me in 1887, called *Faith and Conduct* (Macmillan & Co.)



on the character. At such moments men know, however they may try to sophisticate themselves, that it is life and peace to choose the better and refuse the worse: duty shines before them as an ideal revealed by a power above and beyond themselves; and though they may refuse the duty they cannot do so without guilt and sin.

There are few men indeed who do not sometimes find in their hearts what Butler calls the witness of conscience and Kant calls the "categorical imperative," the clear voice of duty bidding them avoid the worse and choose the better. And this it does quite independently of our hopes and wishes. We may most earnestly long to find that some course which we wish to follow is in the line of duty, and yet never be able for a moment to lose sight of the fact that it is not in that line. We may strive to argue down the sense of duty, may ridicule it, or try to lose it in the crush of active employment, but we cannot root it out of the ground of the heart. When we least think of it, it will suddenly rise before us in undiminished force, until we feel that it has a reality, a permanent vitality, far deeper than that of our feelings, a place in nature more solid than that of the things revealed by sense.

Ethically evil presents itself in a negative light, as imperfection and failure, as a falling short of what one would gladly have attained, bringing dissatisfaction and misery. In climbing the hill of life men constantly slip back, and even if they attain at last to what is better, yet they find moral progress at best but slow, and constantly re-echo the saying of Horace, "*Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor*," or that of Paul, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

Religion, however, regards sin not as something negative, but as something positive. It regards a man in every deed of his as either a loyal subject of God or as in revolt against him. Sin is rebellion, the deliberate or passionate rejection of the higher impulse, and the preference of the lower. It does not spring from mere weakness of the will, but badness in it; or if it spring from weakness, it is weakness which might have been and should have been cured: the weakness which, when indulged, leads men to utter perdition.

Moralists regard ill-doing as mainly to be regretted because it tends to diminish happiness, the happiness of the doer and of those affected by the deed. Religion, going deeper, regards it as vile in itself, as showing a wrong condition of the heart, as indicating a will out of harmony with its surroundings and with the purposes of God. To the sinner it imputes not imperfection but guilt, and it declares that whether he suffers from wrongdoing or not, at all events he deserves to suffer. He has risen in rebellion against his legitimate Ruler. He has actually in some small matters thwarted the intention of the Most High. The extent of that thwarting may be but so small as to be comparable to the extent to which a single mote in the air prevents the beams of the sun from warming and illuminating the world. But however small the power of the sinner, the nature of the sin is the same.

And it is the testimony of the great mass of Christians, that they are conscious in the past course of their lives of having over and over again declined the better course, turned away from the path of good, and that as a consequence their life runs at a lower level than it might have reached. In some cases it was the weaknesses and vices inherited from ancestors which came upon them unawares, and carried them away before they had energy to resist; in other and worse cases they yielded to temptation: wishing certain ends they strove to reach them, whether by a higher or a lower path, and so degraded character in the attainment of the pleasurable.

Having this consciousness, not merely of imperfection, but of sin, not only of not having reached the highest ideal, but of standing at a lower level than he ought to have reached, man searches for a remedy. And he soon finds that there is none in himself. He makes resolves, and in a few days he breaks them. He resolutely sets his face towards the right, and there follows a glow of self-righteous satisfaction which presently lands him in a lower depth than ever. All his endeavours are like attempts to climb a hill of sand or a slope of smooth snow. Utterly dissatisfied with his habits, with his conduct and himself, he is ready to sink into despair, or to drown all reflection in business and anxiety.

Such has been, since the days of St. Paul, the history of all those who have directed their conduct to an ideal end. In religious history, and the biographies of those who have done great works for men, we have hundreds of accounts showing us how usual is this course of experience. But the histories do not stop there. They go on to show that light has arisen in darkness, that amid the despair a revelation has come of a power which can transform life by a new energy. The light which shows man good and evil becomes also a power to help him to avoid the evil and reach the good. Conduct is a field in which divine inspiration works, and man is a being who is adapted to receive divine inspiration as the lightning-rod is capable of transmitting electricity. Man calls upon the Higher Power, and he is strengthened and raised, and enabled to do what he had failed to do in a thousand trials. The deadening feeling of guilt and degradation passes away, and the man walks upright, looking on heaven and earth with changed eyes. He does not attain perfection, either at once or by degrees, but he enters on an upward course, a course marked by narrowness, mistakes, and relapses, but still not utterly unworthy of a high vocation.

Phenomena such as these may well be studied in the annals of such religious movements as the rise of Methodism, or the operations of the Salvation Army. Whether in these extreme manifestations of religious fervour there may not be something morbid I need not inquire. Morbid phenomena are often at least as instructive to the scientific inquirer as the phenomena of health. The thing to observe is that it is a sense of sin, a consciousness of want of harmony between the inner law and the outer life which overpowers strong men, and makes them tremble like a leaf. And the penitents feel that out of the despair produced by the sense of sin they have no means of climbing. No effort of will or resolutions of amendment avail. They must trust to a power outside them. They do not recover peace and balance of mind through resolving that in future they will obey the higher law, but by feeling within themselves a new virtue and power. They wait for a change of heart, a power working in the will, and when they feel it they have a consciousness of being healed, of being put



into healthier relation towards moral good, and enabled to make their future life different from their past life.

The same phenomena which appear in extreme form in religious ecstasy and revival appear in more usual and reasonable shape in the ordinary phenomena of the religious life, which are quite familiar to all to whom religion is a real experience. And since there exists in the minds of nearly all men of education and culture a prejudice against the vulgarity and want of public decency which often mark the doings of revivalist organisations, we turn to the close parallel to the experiences which they reveal which is to be found in works which have long been in constant use among Christians, such works as the *Confessions of Augustine*, the *Imitatio*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. These works all record the relations of human souls to God, their perceptions of spiritual facts, and the emotions, desires and volitions which arise out of those facts. They disclose to us an inner life of intense reality, which moulds the outer and visible life; they go to the roots of our being, and show spiritual forces there operating. And the vast and continued power of these great religious books arises from the fact that their readers find reflected in them their own feelings and their own experiences. Like all the works of highest genius they reach that which is permanent and fundamental in human nature. If they had dealt with fancy rather than fact, if they had been of a sickly and unnatural cast, they would long ago have been forgotten. They live because they are full of the sap of humanity; and he to whom they do not appeal fails to appreciate some of the best and deepest elements of the common life of mankind.

I am not, of course, maintaining the absurd position that all, or that any of us bear in our breasts an instinctive and infallible test of good and evil, so that we can never make mistake between the one and the other. All our senses, even those of the body, are liable to hallucination and error. The art of the conjuror consists in making us suppose that we see what we do not see. Our ears are still more easily imposed upon. Yet eyes and ears correspond to the truth of nature, and are sufficiently trustworthy to be safe guides in daily life. The moral sense is less clear in its testimony and less certain

in its action because it deals with what is more obscure, and because intellectual error and weakness are perpetually shadowing it. Yet it also corresponds to what is real: else it would never have been developed and persisted. It also is a measure of the truth of phenomena, though it requires an education and training more severe than those necessary in case of the bodily senses. Obtuseness of conscience may make us misjudge the character of actions as shortness of sight may make us misjudge the distances of objects. But we do not blind the short-sighted, but give them spectacles. So a defective conscience is not to be slighted but corrected.

Primarily the force which acts in conscience is related not to intellect, but to action. It does not at once illuminate the field of ethics, but it induces men to do what is with them an acknowledged duty. It does not in the first instance enlighten the eyes, but impels heart and will. And yet by degrees it tends to teach more clearly the paths of good and evil. Loyalty of heart to conscience has a steady, clearing effect on the ideas of duty and goodness. Thus a person whose will is bent on doing right may pursue very imperfect ideals, but will only in a few abnormal cases become a scourge to mankind.

The facts of conscience and religion in no way make superfluous the arguments of ethics as to human good and general happiness. They furnish morality with an impulse and a sanction, but not as a rule with an ethical system, though, of course, sometimes such a system may be inseparably intertwined with the religious fervour itself. In origin and in logic religion and ethics are quite separable, though in all the religious schools the two elements are mingled in a multitude of definite ways. And unless a religion has united itself with a noble and stable form of ethics, it is brought to an end by the friction of daily life. It is unsuited to its surroundings, and perishes in the struggle for existence.

Wherever the life of religion exists, whether by gradual growth from childhood, or by a change in middle life, it is nurtured by the sacred customs of the Churches, more especially by the Christian Communion, and by that intercourse with the Higher Power which is called prayer. The

natural history of prayer is little studied. People have commonly regarded it as something too sacred to be studied, almost too sacred to be spoken of. Each man guards the sacred secret in his own bosom. And yet in a time like ours, when everything which is not spoken about is disregarded, and everything unapparent is overlooked, there may be reasons for setting aside any excessive delicacy in the matter. At present, it will be sufficient to refer the reader to a remarkable passage which I have quoted in a later chapter from Dr. Dale's *Living Christ*. There may be an admixture of mistaken theory in that work, but the facts which the writer sets forth with remarkable clearness and force as to the definite and unmistakable results which follow in the life in consequence of prayer seem to me to be established by a mass of evidence which is quite irresistible.

The experience of prayer brings out a remarkable practical paradox. It might naturally be supposed that despair of one's own powers, and leaning upon a force which is not ourselves, must weaken the will, or at least render the character colourless and poor. But precisely the opposite to this takes place. The more men lean on the Higher Power, the more their higher and better side is developed. Character, instead of becoming soft and weak, becomes strong and vigorous; the will gains, as it were, a fresh life. The soul of man seems to cast away its weakness and reach the springs of a new life, when it returns to the ultimate ground of its being. Working with divine aid is not yielding to an irresistible force from without, but enlarging one's own power, taking away the barriers which prevent a flood of higher life from pouring through the heart. Man discovers the truth of the divine paradox that by losing ourselves we find them, and find them renewed and transformed by divine energy.

Some people who are unable to deny the phenomena of the religious life as phenomena, would yet deny their root in the nature of things, would consider them as a mirage which ceases to be when one ceases to look at it. To such objectors Victor Hugo has made a vigorous reply. "Il y a une philosophie qui nie l'infini. Il y aussi une philosophie qui nie le

soleil. Cette philosophie s'appelle cécité." This, however, is an over-statement from the philosophical point of view. For no blind person, presumably, denies the reality or the advantage of seeing, if it were possible to him. But there are many in our days, especially on the Continent, who glory in their spiritual blindness, and regard it as the only healthy condition, who believe religion to be the enemy of progress and the foe of human happiness.

In fact it is necessary to allow that the faculty of spiritual vision is not like the faculty of material vision present in every apparently healthy person, but that it is absent, or rather dormant, in the case of many men, and when it is present, has very many degrees of acuteness and vigour in various natures. Men differ the one from the other remarkably in their power of realising the presence and working of the Higher Power; and the same men, at various times in their lives, possess this power in a greater and a less degree. A better parallel to spiritual susceptibility than that offered by ordinary vision is to be found in the susceptibility to musical sounds. The faculty of perceiving and of appreciating music belongs by nature to men in various degrees, and can be cultivated into great delicacy or neglected until it almost dies out. Some persons can with difficulty distinguish one tune from another, while to others some new and unexpected harmony of sounds brings an intense delight.

Of course this comparison is only made for the sake of illustration. Susceptibility to religious experience is as much more important than power to appreciate music as conduct and life are more important than artistic taste. But taking this comparison as valid, and supposing that the sense of the supernatural really resembles an artistic taste, it will yet be saved from the charge of unreality. Every one would allow that musical appreciation is based upon the permanent and fundamental elements of human nature. No reasonable person would deny its value because he was himself deficient in it. It is, indeed, quite evident that the pleasure which in each succeeding generation music gives to mankind is quite sufficient proof that man is a musical being, and that he who has no ear or love for music is in that respect a lesser man

than he who has a musical ear. But our delight in music is its own reward, and brings with it to ordinary men emotions indeed and pleasure, but no intellectual inferences, no views of the universe, no scheme of life. Whereas, experience in religion at once carries men on beyond itself, requires a share in their thoughts, leads them to alter their ways of living, gives them hope beyond the grave. And it is taught by the highest authorities in religious matters that all have at least in some degree the faculties exercised in religion, though they be often either paralysed or perverted. A man without ideals and without a conscience might be kept from obvious wickedness by fear of punishment or the influence of friends, but he would be only half human after all. And where conscience and ideals exist, there, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, must religion exist also.

Such appear to me to be the primary facts of the religious life; the exact meaning and force of those facts will be considered in future chapters. Some critics may object that I rely too exclusively upon Christian experience in setting forth the facts of essential religion. My reply is that the phenomena of religion are by far most fully and clearly displayed in the history of Christianity. In the explanations which follow also my line will be primarily Christian, because in my opinion the great teachers of Christianity have far better understood the psychology of religion than have any investigators who have proceeded on other lines. I speak only of the practical teaching of Christianity: the psychology of Christian doctrine is, as we shall see later, of another kind.



## CHAPTER III

### THE PRACTICAL GROUNDS OF BELIEF

IT is facts such as those briefly touched on in our second chapter which make up the subject-matter of religion, and which give to religion its permanent vitality. If they were fancies rather than facts, no gorgeous ceremonial, no system of a state church, no threats of future punishment, could keep religion alive among us, still less could, from time to time, revive the failing flame of religious enthusiasm. If the answer to prayer were unreal, and the bestowal of divine help a dream, all our churches would, ages ago, have fallen to pieces. If the beliefs of the higher life were unfit to stand the test of living, of pleasure and pain, and the competition with the attractions of the world, they would fall into contempt, and be regarded as mere lumber in the storehouse of history, instead of attracting by a kind of natural fascination the great majority of those who desire to do some good among men, those possessed by an ambition which is not satiated by the mere successes of the world.

And on these facts personal religion is based. People who have in their own history verified their truth, build upon them a fabric of belief which is altogether beyond the reach of attack; attain a position whence they can look down in easy indifference on all the intellectual difficulties with which our age is so harassed and beset. If they are asked for a justification of the faith that is in them, they commonly answer in the language of the Gospel, "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

But although nothing can shake the position of those who

are content in private to taste the fruits and live the life of religion, yet that position has, in reference to science and to society, the weakness of being subjective only. He who has belief can repel the objector, but he cannot without further ado refute him; certainly cannot conquer and win him. The great problem of those who write on the theoretic or rational aspect of religion is to turn this subjective certainty into objective assertion, to develop the inferences which may safely be drawn from the facts of religious consciousness, and to place the truths of faith on terms with the truths of science.

It is necessary to transmute the "I feel" and "I know" of the religious man into statements with regard to God and man which will bear investigation and repetition, which no wise man need be ashamed to utter, and no man of science need be obliged to place in a cell of knowledge separate from those in which he holds the rest of his discoveries.

Experience and reasoning make up the fabric of our ordinary knowledge. If we were merely passive beings and had no active life, no will or character, we should rest in them wholly. But the moment we begin to act, faith comes in. Faith is the determination to rest in and to act upon certain views which the mind has arrived at, whether by experience or reasoning, whether wisely or unwisely. The evidence on which faith acts may be various, and of very various degrees of value. But that does not affect the character of faith, which may be strongest where it is least firmly based. It is by faith that a man plunges headforemost into water, trusting to rise up again to the surface. By experience he knows the buoyancy of water, but to act on the knowledge requires faith. It is by faith that we refuse to believe that a friend has done a dishonourable action. The indications that he has so acted may be strong, and our proofs of our friend's character may in the scales of reason be lighter; yet we determine to stand by our own experience, and so the will takes its own course; it has faith in the friend and will believe nothing to his detriment, unless compelled.

Religious faith is of the same character. It also is concerned with action and with present fact. On the ground of inner experience, or it may be in reliance on the testimony of

those whom we respect, we make up our minds to rest in and to act upon certain views as to the existence and the nature of God, as to our own souls and their destiny, as to the purposes underlying the world and the course of history. And religious faith may be either justified or perverted, be either a true or a false guide in life. Thus it is of the utmost consequence that our religious faith should correspond to the facts of our environment: otherwise we are sure to go astray. Therefore we must proceed with the greatest caution in our endeavour to reach in religious matters such certainty as may be a legitimate basis of faith. But it by no means follows that we shall or can reach religious truth which is from the speculative point of view entirely unassailable. We must learn and observe that we may act, not merely that we may know. And if our action leads to success and happiness, this is a *prima facie* indication that the knowledge on which it was based had important elements of truth in it.

In this matter religious knowledge proceeds on exactly the same lines as knowledge of the material world and of the human beings about us. Sensation gives us the materials for a knowledge of the world, but it does not give us that knowledge directly. If we were not interested in the world, and had not to live our life in it, sensations would come to us like the pictures of a kaleidoscope, fair shapes without any meaning. But necessities of action, purpose, will, and faith, build up out of the impressions of sensation a material world of which ourselves are part. Our senses bring us only the bricks of which we build the temple of knowledge, and we add from our inner selves not merely the cement which binds the bricks together, but the purpose and design according to which the edifice takes its form. The whole feeling of objectivity, as applied to the material world, arises from purposes carried out or frustrated, pleasure and pain, hope and fear. And we may see this still more clearly if we consider not merely the physical world, but that part of it which consists of human beings like ourselves.

If we pass by all the physical difficulties which hang around any possible perception of an objective world about us, and allow that our senses are sources of real and trustworthy



information as to the material world, yet even then it is clear that they cannot immediately inform us that human beings conscious like ourselves surround us. They can show us that we dwell amid a number of bodies formed like our own, constantly occupied with this or that, forwarding or thwarting our plans, and daily conversing with us. But they cannot by any possibility prove that these bodies are more than unconscious automata. The only will and thought of which we can possibly be immediately aware are our own; if we believe that our friends also are conscious, have will and thought of their own, this must be an addition which we make to the facts of sense. If there ever lived a man who supposed himself to be the only conscious being in existence, he could probably never be confuted. But all sane human beings have come to the belief that those about them are willing and conscious creatures. And mainly, I think, on two grounds. First, there is the ground of analogy and inference. We see in others actions and expressions which we know in our own case to accompany certain feelings and thoughts and volitions; we therefore naturally assume that similar effects have similar causes, and that what is in our own case the result of purpose, must be the result of purpose, and so of consciousness, in others. But the presumption arising from mere inference would be but a feeble and languid thing, were it not reinforced by the active faculties of the mind, by the personal will. We find that the people with whom we have to do have different purposes from ours, thwart our desires, and rob us of expected pleasure. They do not do what we expected of them, nor what we wished them to do. Such experiences as these impress upon us with constantly recurring emphasis the independence and objectivity of other selves.

And more than this. The intensity with which we realise the existence of other selves, the completeness of our conviction that they are as real as we are, depends upon and arises out of social feelings, feelings of compassion and admiration, of love and hatred.

The strongest love, when it rises above the personal needs on which it was based, feels the most intensely that those who are its objects are conscious, moral, responsible, having a past

history and future possibilities. Looking from within we shall see that a very small contribution to any of our social feelings and energies is given by mere perceptions, and a far larger contribution by the instincts which objectify a world about us full of spirits, like ourselves, clad in flesh, and moving on the stage of the world. And it is a necessary part of our belief that if we passed away, these other human beings would remain to live and to feel quite apart from our experience of them.

In the case of religious perception and belief we move in the same lines. Here also the influence of a sort of moral inspiration, a spiritual director of our lives, if made at all by the intellect, remains vague and feeble apart from practical life. In this case we begin not with physical perception, but with mental experience, which is equally trustworthy and equally clear. It reveals to us a Being above our wisdom and our thought, who answers prayer in ways which we had not foreseen, who guides our lives with a foresight far beyond our own, and who enables us to do that for which our own strength was utterly insufficient. If it is illegitimate to infer from these facts the objective existence of a Deity, then it is illegitimate to infer from the perceptions of sense the objective existence of father or mother, wife or child.

But here also all the force and value of the belief which we reach is derived from the will. By languidly thinking it probable that there is a Deity men make no advance in the path of life and conduct. It is necessary to realise that he is with the full intensity of passion and will; to hold communion with him, to be guided by him, to subordinate our wills to his. And the more we do so, the more the spiritual life penetrates the web of our mundane existence.

And in this case also feeling and instinct, religious feeling and instinct as opposed to social, play about the mere facts of experience, and day by day make those who are trying to live the spiritual life more convinced of the existence and the goodness of God, and more full of reverence and love for him. To what height these feelings may rise we may learn from the great religious books of the world, from Augustine and Calvin, from Tauler and À Kempis. They are no isolated phenomena,

but parallel to the rest of our moral and mental activities. Sensation is but the suggestion of life: will, emotion, passion, these are life itself. And spiritual and social life are built on the basis of sensation by similar faculties and in similar fashion.

It is thus clear that in all provinces of knowledge, whether it be knowledge of the world around us, or of human beings, or of God himself, objectivity is introduced not by intellect, but by will. Observation can never overstep the adamantine limits of brain and nerve whereby it is enclosed. We can have no perception of things save as they are reproduced to us and in us. And intellect can but combine the data of sense, can but compare and contrast, but cannot add to the original impressions. If there were a being who lived only the life of sense and intellect, who had no wants, no fears, and no hopes, to him the very notion of objectivity would be entirely void and meaningless, a perfect blank. It is desire, passion, sympathy which lead us to give objectivity, first to the material world, then to the world of other selves, and then to the Ruler of the spiritual world. And in the case of all three worlds the road to objectivity is one and the same.

Objectivity being thus given by will rather than by intellect attaches in far the highest degree to character. Character is the personality built up within by successive acts of volition. It is character which we recognise as the inmost kernel of the being of all about us. When we study the world and history it seems that the inner purpose of all of it is the provision of a moral discipline whereby character is formed and sustained. Hence our mere material surroundings seem like a fleeting and momentary show, compared to the solidity and importance of character. If anything be worth doing in the world it is the formation of character. If anything be objective in the world it is formed character.

The founder of modern philosophy, Descartes, built his system of knowledge on the proposition *cogito ergo sum*. But philosophy has since found out that in the *ergo* dwells no real force of inference, and that the proposition does not really widen our knowledge. A safer basis both for thought and life will be found in the statement *volendo et amando fio*. Hence springs

the sense of a personality in one's self, and the conviction of the existence of other personalities. This is the bridge which leads us from the mere phenomena to that which is real and eternal. It is love, feeling, and passion which give rise to every man as a phenomenon of the world of sense; and it is the same energies of the soul which give man a personality and a place in the transcendental world.

Such is the justification of the religion of conduct as opposed to that of speculation. If this basis be unsound all the present work is a house built on the sand. It is therefore necessary to consider, in some detail, the main objections which will be brought against it. But, as a preliminary, let us see to what kind of assertion it will lead us as to the nature of God. How is doctrine to be founded on this basis?

## CHAPTER IV

### EXPERIENCE AND DOCTRINE

WE thus come in sight of a method of procedure. Our argument has practical rather than theoretic grounds. Most of what we know or can know directly of our own higher nature or of God is furnished to us not by sense, and not by intellect working up the data of sense, but by man's conscience and faculties of action. Let us apply the method in the case of some of those attributes which seem the most essential to the divine nature, and first in the case of the divine goodness. No one can by searching find out God to perfection; but it may be possible to place certain elementary facts in regard to his being in a clear light.

If we attempt from the order visible in the material world to argue that the author of that world is good, we pursue a course which cannot be called altogether illegitimate, and yet which will be found in the result very unsatisfactory. For in the first place we are not competent to judge of the scheme of nature as a whole: it is too vast for our poor faculties. And in the second place, it has seemed to many wise men that the arrangements of the material universe do not bear the impress of consummate goodness. A modern poet exaggerates this feeling when he speaks of nature as "red in tooth and claw with ravin," and as "shrieking against our creed"; and though this statement is one-sided and exaggerated to the verge of unreality, it is not baseless. Hence in ancient days many philosophers held the world to be the work not of a perfect creator, but of an imperfect demiurge.

Such views are now out of date. We have been steadily growing in the knowledge of nature; and recent writers, in particular the author of *Natural Religion*, have shown how the study of nature may lead to a lofty theism. But the theism which is thus founded is exceedingly hard and cold unless warmed and made moral and living by elements borrowed from the religion of conduct. It is the greatness rather than the goodness of God which impresses the man of science.

On the other hand the religious emotions which give colour to the spiritual life, though in the highest degree a source of happiness and a cause of exaltation, are in character not sufficiently definite to form a basis of any intellectual construction.

But when, on the other hand, we start from the direct facts of human consciousness, it is no longer a matter of reasoning and of doubtfulness to prove that God is good. For the power which speaks in conscience is, if we may hazard a bold phrase, good first and divine afterwards. Goodness, the perception of what is good, and the desire of what is good, are the *differentia* of that power, the primary fact whereby it is revealed.

The very facts of conduct, in their essential nature, lead us directly to certain views in regard to God, the truth of which can scarcely be matter of dispute, unless the facts themselves be denied. These facts reveal to us that God is on the side of virtue, of right-doing. And this seems to be at all events the most essential part of what we mean when we say that God is good. If, however, we start from some theological thesis, such as that God is the sum of all perfections, and so must be infinitely good, we lose ourselves in a cloud of wordy abstractions, which may have a meaning, or may have none. If we say that God as he exists in his eternal essence, and without any regard to the human race, is infinitely good, we use words which, strictly speaking, have no meaning whatever, for all our knowledge and all our wisdom is limited by the bounds of experience, and when we speak of what is unrelated to our experience we speak of what is for us non-existent.

The word good is doubtless somewhat vague. What it means in this connection is that God is on the side of human progress towards ideal morality. In one age one virtue is most



necessary to such progress, in another age a different virtue. And this very fact must warn us against applying to God the term good in too objective a sense. We should be shocked if there were predicated of the Divine Being some qualities which, in the case of the savage, may be of very high value for the preservation of the race. "Plato congratulates the Athenians on having shown in their relations to Persia, beyond all the other Greeks, a pure and heart-felt hatred of the foreign nature."<sup>1</sup> At that time hatred of the foreign nature was in the tribal morality of the Greeks a virtue, but none of us would like to say that God hated the Persian and the Carthaginian. The same thing holds in our own day. There can be no high or manly virtue without a certain amount of courage, and if we look into the world, we see that God is on the side of courage; yet to ascribe to God, as creator of the universe and source of life, the attribute of courage, would be at once seen to be unmeaning. And the same reasoning applies to other virtues. Chastity is a high human virtue, but it obviously implies a body and domestic relations. We know that God wishes us to be chaste, but irreverence would scarcely reach the length of speaking of the Father in Heaven as chaste. And so on in other cases. Virtue in us consists of the repulse of temptation; where there is no temptation there can be no human virtue. Morality is relative to man's surroundings; alter the surroundings and it becomes changed. It is a revelation of the divine, but does not comprehend the divine. It is only in the human and relative sense that we can dare to speak of God as good. But the facts of conduct at once imply that God is on the side of goodness, and intends us so to act.

In the very facts of conduct there are involved also truths in regard to our own nature, as well as in regard to the divine character. We learn in them that we are moral and spiritual beings, capable of better and of worse, and responsible for choosing the better or the worse. We feel that if our will sets itself on the side of what is good, we rise in the scale of the universe; but if our will chooses what is evil, we fall at once to a lower level than that of which we are capable. So

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Menæxenus*, p. 245. Quoted in *Ecce Homo*, ch. xiv.



we find that we have wills of which morality is a necessary condition.

These, then, are the primary facts of natural religion, the basis on which all further developments of religion are founded. It may be said that even so much is not natural to man as man, that savages in this or that part of the world seem to have no moral sense, are superstitious without religion, and punctilious without ethics. The germs of conduct exist everywhere; it may, however, be developed, not at the initial stage of human progress, but at a later time. It is none the less human. Modern studies of development have done away with the notion that man is endued with a set of inalienable characteristics which may be found alike in the savage and in the philosopher. As he rises from savagery, man attains new powers and fresh characteristics, which are none the less human and real because historically they arise by slow degrees and not all at once. Infants, like savages, are destitute of the powers involved in conduct, and so of the knowledge which rises out of it. But as infants become men and women, the world of conduct is slowly revealed within them. And then they come to the facts about God and man which make the basis of religion.

Of course it is not in conduct alone, in that which is ethically good and bad, that the divine impulse and inspiration of life are to be traced. In the impulse which leads men to prolonged investigations in matters of science, in the urging which leads to the production of great and memorable works of art, we may also find the working of a higher power. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." But if we began to speak of science and of art, of all the impulses which lead to the development and the raising of life, our task would become an impossible one. So while fully recognising that I am taking up some aspects of religion and neglecting others, I have chosen in the present work to speak almost exclusively of conduct, and of doctrine in relation to conduct. The principles and the phenomena which we observe in this part of the field of observation may be traced in different developments and amid other circumstances in the rest of it.

If we bear in mind the fact that we are speaking, not of

the consciousness of savages or barbarians, but of that of the adult European races, we may further develop the doctrinal contents of religion.

The chief source of our knowledge of the Divine Nature is that communion with the Higher Power which is called prayer. In regard to prayer, there are a number of speculative difficulties. Many people in our days have persuaded themselves that the effects of prayer are only subjective; that prayer does not move the will of God, but only brings our wills into a more healthy state. It is quite unprofitable to discuss from the *a priori* point of view the relations between the human and the divine will. If we begin by making assumptions as to what the Divine Nature must be, instead of inquiring how it is revealed to us, we enter on a fruitless task. It seems to me sufficient to point to the enormous consensus of testimony from wise and simple, learned and ignorant, sceptical and credulous, which affirms as a matter of personal knowledge that prayer does bring answers which change not only the will of him who prays, but his character, his circumstances, and the ways of others.

If we are prepared to accept our experience of what does take place, rather than our fancies of what ought to take place, we must allow that prayer is often answered. And in the answer to prayer there is a feature of the greatest importance, the element, so to speak, of arbitrariness. Those who have had answer to prayer cannot be sure that they could again secure similar answer by similar prayer. On another occasion the answer may be entirely different. He who prays for liberation from disease may in one case be raised up, and in another, I will not say left to die, but prepared for death. He who prays for reformation of character may fall into the slough of evil ways again and again before his final rescue.

Those who repudiate divine intervention in the world have various ways of their own for accounting for these phenomena, which they can scarcely entirely neglect or deny. Yet it is hard to see how any explanation of theirs can meet this particular feature of apparent arbitrariness, which is yet essential to the matter. In the universe generally like causes are followed by like effects. But in this case like causes are

followed by effects to all appearance entirely diverse. They can be regarded as alike in a sense, as all proceeding from divine goodness and compassion exerted in various ways, but they cannot be regarded as alike in any naturalist sense.

And as there is a complete contrast between the phenomena of prayer and the events of the material world, so there is an absolute similarity between them and the phenomena of human society. Our requests made to friends, likewise, bring no necessary answer; sometimes they are granted, and sometimes refused; sometimes they meet with one response, and sometimes with another. It is precisely this incalculable element, this entire independence of our will and of the whole of our subjectivity in the actions and reactions of our friends, which gives us a vivid sense of their character and personality. It is not easy to see why the same argument should not apply to God also, and why his treatment of prayer should not be considered as a full justification of our attributing to him also personality.

Nor do the facts of grace and of prayer by any means stop at the attribution of personality to God. Men have found by experience that in the answer to prayer that which often seems arbitrary covers another element, not one of rigid law or invariable sequence, but one of kindness and mercy. When men look at their lives as they lie in perspective behind them, they often discern the guidance of a wiser thought and a higher purpose than their own. The belief in an individual Providence is universal among those who are spiritually minded, and often forces itself on those whose religion is unformed and inarticulate. We have it on Hamlet's authority that "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." And almost all great men of action of whom history speaks have believed their deeds to be under the controlling power of a higher purpose. Religion builds upon this natural and universal sentiment a loftier doctrine. None can always feel an absolute trust in the purposes of God; all of us are sometimes in a state of revolt, open or unexpressed, against those purposes. Yet it appears that those who earnestly try to lead the divine life commonly grow with the years more reconciled to the hand of an overruling Pro-

vidence, and less disposed to set up their own will against it. Therefore, we may fairly say that the attribution of the highest wisdom and power to God is dictated by the widest and deepest spiritual experience. We say that he who thus plans and directs, who averts evil and bestows good, must be not only kind and loving, but a kind and loving Person.

Such is the natural exclamation of piety; and if it be merely intended as the expression of experience in the nearest terms of our rough human language, it will be well. We cannot dissociate love and care from personality, and in fact an intense feeling of the personality of friend and relative is quite inseparable from love to them or clear realisation of their love for us. But when in a mood of philosophic analysis we approach the attribution of personality to God, we at once see that it cannot be regarded as logically defensible. Personality, as we know it, consists of a single stream of thought and volition. Cases have been heard of in recent years in which strange diseases have made men live two disconnected lives at different times, and we have called these cases of double personality. There is scarcely any word of so difficult interpretation, from the psychological point of view, as the word person. But that he who made and sustains all things, and knows the hearts of all men, can be personal in any sense in the least intelligible to us is impossible. And in fact there is in the communication of God with man a remarkable feature, in that the communication seems to shut out all the rest of mankind, that we have to do, as Cardinal Newman says, *solus cum solo*. It is this feature in God's dealing with man which has especially led the religious in many ages to interpose between themselves and the Divine Being all sorts of intermediaries, angels and saints, who might more reasonably be supposed to devote attention and care to men one at a time. They have masked the impersonal God by a multitude of inferior personalities in dependence upon him. This also is a way of throwing the facts into intellectual form; but whatever form of speech or turn of thought be adopted, the facts remain as before.

It may be said that to other human beings we can only attribute personality by inference from their observed actions,

and that thus we have as good a right to affirm personality of God as of any other human self, save the one self of which we have immediate consciousness. It is hard to see how this argument can be met within the bounds of strict logic. But all that it can really prove is that there is in God, as revealed in conduct, something of a like nature to human personality. This seems to show that God, as known by man, includes personality rather than that God is limited by personality. If we compare personality to that which, in the things of experience, it most resembles, a line, length without breadth, then we may say that personality is included in the Divine Nature as a given line is included in infinite space, or rather as it would be included in space, not of three dimensions, but of a million dimensions.

And again, it is an essential element in our notion of personality that it should be exclusive. Our personalities are shut off by hard lines from those of our friends, even the most intimate. And the more we respect our friends the more objective and exclusive do their personalities appear. With the divine influence in life it is otherwise. It acts not from without us, but from within us, not by opposing our wills, but by strengthening our best selves. Thus the Jewish prophets spoke not in their own name, but in that of Jehovah, while they yet expressed their own best thought. Thus St. Paul said that he no longer lived, but Christ lived in him; yet we find in St. Paul's writings not only the expression of high thought, but the display of a strongly marked personality. The notion that the Spirit of God speaks through men as through mere instruments is an utterly false notion. God inspires personality, rather than is revealed as personality. "In him we live and move and have our being."

Thus in a case where reason strictly followed lands us in an insoluble antinomy, the heart and conscience may have free course. While the personality of God must always to reflection present insoluble difficulties, the heart may, as the history of thousands of Christians has proved, love and adore, may enter into intimate relations with the source of life and being. Whatever speculation may say, to Christian belief as well as to action God is personal, and takes a personal and loving interest



in the lives of all those of his creatures who do not revolt against his guidance.

The existence in the world of evil and sin, the fact that we are constantly tempted to do what we know to be wrong, has from the first cast its dark shadow, not only over practical life, but over religious faith. In our days an easy-going optimism is apt to make light of this shadow, but it is still there. The sunshine of material prosperity has for a moment made it less strongly marked to the eyes of the well-to-do classes. But those who dwell and labour among the poor still see its darkness; and in the days which before long are likely to come upon the world, it will stand out as clear as ever. The existence of this darker and sterner side of religion must never be forgotten; and it must modify not only our hopes and our activities, but also our beliefs.

There can be no doubt as to the impression which the facts of temptation and of sin have produced on the minds of the great Christian leaders and saints of past ages. As the inspiration for good comes from God, so the inspiration for evil, they have held, comes from the arch-enemy of God and man, the Devil. At many periods of history it might seem that Christian belief and imagination have been more taken up with the Devil than with God. The Founder of Christianity appears to have continually spoken of the malign activity in the world of evil spirits; and his first followers regarded the direct opposition of Satan to their preaching as the principal obstacle which it had to encounter. The great Christian Reformers of the sixteenth century, Calvin and Luther, believed in diabolic interference in the world as fully and as unhesitatingly as they believed in the divine inspiration of conduct. And in the more recent outbursts of enthusiasm of which I have already spoken, the great religious leaders have felt with intensity that they had to contend not with mere flesh and blood, but with spiritual powers of evil, who thwarted their endeavours, and stirred up against them the hearts of such men as were inclined to evil.

The fact of evil inspiration in all human life must be granted. We must allow that unseen agencies in the world are ever impelling us to leave the better and choose the

worse, to forsake the divine guidance and sin against our own souls. Sad and gloomy as are these facts, they belong to the very essence of spiritual experience, and no one who regarded that experience as real could reject them. And it seems natural to pass on, in the case of evil, as in the case of good inspiration, from experience to perception, and to say that as impulses to good come from a God who loves good, so impulses to evil come from a Devil who loves evil, and some of whose attributes may be judged from the primary facts of experience.

But the legitimacy of this inference is weakened by other considerations. Impulse to good must come from a super-human source, since no other source can be reasonably assumed. Mr. Clifford's "racial consciousness" in each man could never lead to the arduous heights of virtue. But most at all events of our impulses to evil might arise out of inherited tendencies, might be explained by the facts of atavism. We are descended from men who were almost on the moral level of apes and tigers, and the ape and tiger in us is apt to rise from the ground of the heart again. Reversion to an ancestral type is a fact familiar to biologists. And some schools of religious thought have found in this fact an explanation of the attractiveness of sin. Even within the New Testament this view is frequently expressed. St. Paul complains that in his flesh he finds nothing but evil, a "body of death"; and St. James writes, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." And many later Christians have seen, in the utter perversion and corruption of their own hearts, in what has been called original sin, quite enough to explain their declension from good.

Moreover, we now know that many effects in former days, attributed to the agency of daemons, had other causes. Insanity and even epilepsy were in the early days of Christianity regarded as cases of diabolic possession; and no one now so regards them. And the phenomena of witchcraft, which were in the Middle Ages supposed to give daily and hourly evidence of the interference of evil spirits in the affairs of this life, are now supposed to have been greatly coloured by imagination. Moreover, those who have strongly believed in diabolic inspiration have not been consistent one with another in their views



as to the source of such inspiration, as one being or many, as always present or as only sometimes interfering with life, and the like.

Thus in modern days the belief in a great Power of spiritual wickedness has lost some of its intensity, though even now those who have a clear and overpowering sense of the spiritual life feel the working of such a Power, and only hesitate when the question arises how the facts of that working can be put in intellectual form. We have no right to assume that our modern tendency is the final decision of human thought; but it is the tendency of our time, and I see no reason for making a strong stand against it. The facts of evil are obvious and sad indeed at all times. And those who are most closely in contact with them seem unable to resist the conviction of a constant spiritual tendency to evil in nature, over and above the radical selfishness of the human will, and the savage elements hidden under the surface of each of us. But we need not at present try to go further in the direction of building up a doctrine of the power of Evil.

It is necessary now to state more exactly the view which our principles, which are psychological and practical rather than metaphysical, compel us to take of the character of religious doctrine. We have shown how certain views as to the nature of God and man, of sin and of duty, arise directly out of the experience of life. And we have also shown that the notion of objectivity in regard to knowledge is due not to the faculties of knowledge, but to those of action. Will is the only real thing, and by relation to will the world about us takes reality in all its three forms: the material world, the world of other selves, and the spiritual world. The fundamental contrasts, I and the world, I and others, I and God, build up the fabric of the universe. It is the third of these contrasts which furnishes a basis to the religion of conduct, and on it we must be content to found religious doctrine.

I am anxious here to avoid, as far as possible, all metaphysical discussion. Almost all the problems of metaphysics may be stated, not in the technical language introduced by Kant, but in the speech of every day. Nevertheless metaphysical language has the advantage of neatness and precision.

And it may be well that at this point I should endeavour in more exact terms to indicate the philosophic position which I would assume. Objective knowledge in religion is unattainable, if by objective knowledge be meant knowledge of things in themselves out of relation to human experience. All our knowledge is necessarily and essentially relative to our faculties and experience, beyond which we can never hope to rise on this side of death.

But what we may reach, in religious as in other knowledge, is universal subjectivity and practical objectivity. We reach universal subjectivity when we reach knowledge which is true not only for us, but for all other human beings, or all other human beings whose higher faculties are developed, when we eliminate the mere personal element in our knowledge, and find that it rests on a secure basis of human nature. What is true for man as man is the highest human truth. And we reach practical objectivity when we discover that on which it answers to act, as if it were true. Whatever speculative difficulties remain, if we find knowledge which can be assumed to be true without leading to unhappiness and failure, we have reached what is true for us. Thus if the knowledge we reach is practically objective, and also universally valid, we need not hesitate to rest in and act upon it. It is the basis provided for faith by the Maker and Ruler of the world.

If we could reach knowledge objectively valid from the speculative point of view, it might better satisfy our reason. But since the rise of the Critical Philosophy we know this to be impossible. The change which has thus been produced in our thought has been well compared to the change from a geocentric to a heliocentric scheme of astronomy. When men supposed the earth to be flat and the heaven arched above it, they thought they could use the words up and down in a purely objective sense. But now we know that up is merely further from the centre of the earth, and down is merely nearer to the centre of the earth. And when the sun is up above our heads, it is down beneath the feet of the people of New Zealand. Yet the terms up and down have not lost their validity for the human race. No longer objectively true, they are true relatively. And in regard to practical life they

are just as full of meaning as ever they were. In the same way the discovery by the speculative intellect of the relative character of religious knowledge does not affect it in the light of practical life.

When men have any beliefs in religious matters, and talk about them, the formulation of doctrine is a necessity. No doubt in our days many men reserve their religious hopes and beliefs as a sacred secret of the heart, and make no attempt to give them expression in words. This is, however, an abnormal phenomenon; and it is evident that if religion is to be anything but a hidden inspiration, if it is to dictate common action, to make terms with science, to direct organisation, it must become articulate and express itself in formulæ.

The ordinary tests of religious doctrine are determined by the discussions of the last chapters. It is clear that the mere understanding, which is a judge of consistency rather than of truth, can very imperfectly appreciate doctrine. It may in some cases detect error, but will scarcely lead to truth. It is mainly to the practical side of our nature that we must look for guidance in religion as in other fields of active life.

Properly speaking, religious doctrine is the formulation in terms of intellect of the results of religious experience. It therefore appears that in order to be justified in the courts of reason and history it should possess the following notes.

First, it should be based on real experience, and so conform to our surroundings, and the laws of the universe. It should be built upon the rock of fact, not on the shifting sands of fancy and emotion. If it thus conform to reality, it will be safe as a guide of conduct, for conduct is only safe and successful when it is perfectly adapted to surrounding conditions. In the physical world we can rule nature only by obeying her; so in the moral world we can attain the purposes of life only by conforming to the conditions of life.

Second, the experience on which it is based should be not temporary or local, but universal or at least general and permanent. If we consider particular countries, or particular periods of history, we may find that in them extreme or morbid phenomena were prominent in religion. Such was the passion for the hermit's life which

spread in the East under the later Roman Empire, and such the strange religious aberrations of the sixteenth century in Germany. At such times of abnormal practice, strange doctrines also naturally have currency.

Third, the doctrine itself must not be cast in the mould of false and perverted intellectual views. This is, of course, a danger which no doctrine can wholly escape, since no systems of thought are free from error. But at least, when we see in a doctrine the impress of some metaphysical or scientific views which are demonstrably false, we are bound to refuse it in its existing form, and to recur to the experiences on which it is based with a view to the formulation of a more suitable doctrine.

Doctrines which are based upon religious experiences, real and solid, and held by the most of those who reflect, and which are expressed in the forms of sound philosophic and scientific system, may well be received as true. Their truth may not be for all time, since the intellectual and moral conditions of human life are constantly changing, but they are true for our age at least.

And the knowledge thus reached is objective in the only sense in which the word objective has any meaning. Hence to call it relative, though on the speculative side this may be a correct statement, is apt to mislead. To the intellect it is relative, but to the will and the faculties of action it is absolute.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To the question of doctrine in general, and particularly Christian doctrine, we return in Chapter XXV., and those which follow.

## CHAPTER V

### DOCTRINE AND METAPHYSICS

THE view that religious doctrine has practical rather than intellectual grounds, and practical rather than speculative validity, undoubtedly runs counter to the current views of most philosophers and theologians, views of ancient standing and distinguished lineage, which can be traced back to roots which lie deep in Greek philosophy. It is easy to see how they arose, in the dawn of scientific thought, and how hard it must be to move them when fully established.

When the Greeks, in days before the Persian wars, began to discover the use of the speculative intellect, they naturally tried their new implement in every possible field of knowledge, and especially in the highest. They naturally supposed that their new science of reasoning would enable them to discover all truth as to the world, man, and the divine nature, and to develop a natural philosophy and a theology which should be of complete validity. It was not very long before they found that for the explanation of the external world observation and experiment were of more use than thought and argument. But as regards theology, their over-estimate of reason lasted far longer. Logical and speculative theology held the field in the days of the Stoics and Epicureans, and filled the atmosphere which was breathed by growing Christianity. It was not until the rise of the Kantian philosophy in the last century that speculative schemes of theology received a mortal blow.

The overvaluing of the intellectual faculties of mankind,



introduced by the philosophers of Ionia, and propagated by Plato and Aristotle and the schools which they founded, still rules the minds of all men who have not been through a particular schooling. We suppose that the laws of human thought have some objective and supersensual validity, that angels must think on our lines. Nay, some philosophers, not content with thinking that in reason we may claim likeness to God himself, have ventured to regard the Ruler of the Universe as pure thought. Thought is doubtless a manifestation of God: but to accept such an identification as anything but a symbol is mere presumption in a creature to whom space has but three dimensions, and whose thinking is absolutely bounded by time! The feeblest of insects may rebuke our conceit. For it has been proved by the experiments of Sir John Lubbock that ants are very susceptible to rays of light which are to us non-existent. Butterflies have a sense of smell of which we can form but a dim notion; and the instincts displayed by many other creatures of small intelligence show us that they have avenues of knowledge which we cannot even understand. The human mind is like a piano which has a definite number of notes, and is quite unable to produce sounds outside its narrow compass. Or it is like a lantern shining in a vast cave and bringing to our sight a few of the nearest objects. By means of such a lantern we may safely guide our steps, though there yawn to right and left of us abysses which we cannot fathom. So by means of our poor intellectual faculties we may guide our lives and form character. But when we fancy that they can comprehend the vast range of existence, and be rulers of the universe of possible thought, then we absurdly over-estimate them, and deserve the blindness which we bring on ourselves by trying to gaze at the noonday sun.

Metaphysics, as the science which marks out the limits of human thought, will always be of great value to mankind. But metaphysicians who pass those limits, and try to build systems in the vast void beyond, are by the very circumstances of the case precluded from lasting success. It seems likely that for a long while to come such systems will from time to time arise, and exercise a great influence on thoughtful minds.

It may be, however, that their utility lies rather in what they suggest than in what they establish. As poetry may stir the heart with a passion for the supersensual and the infinite, so may metaphysical systems raise the aspirations of the soul by furnishing to it a vision of that which transcends mere experience. But the vision passes; it rests upon no enduring foundation; and soon another kind of vision takes its place in the minds of those devoted to the delights of philosophy. The walls of the castle are not of stone but of blocks of ice.

No doubt, if we could find a basis outside the world of sense, if there existed any possibility of taking our start from facts in regard to the Divine Being which could be proved in an objective sense, and without regard to human faculties and human experience, this might give us means for formulating a speculative and permanent theology. But such knowledge is impossible to man in regard to any object of experience; and, if we may so speak, even more impossible in regard to objects which do not come before our corporeal senses.

The case as regards the grounds of religious belief has been put in a satisfactory, perhaps in a final form, in the celebrated *Bampton Lectures* of Dean Mansel, the main arguments of which, whatever we may think of the views which he bases on those arguments, remain after half a century unrefuted and unrefutable. Mansel shows clearly into what an infinite quagmire of absurdity and self-contradiction we fall the moment we begin to frame speculative propositions in regard to the Divine Being. He proves that if we start from the assumption that God is infinite and absolute, we at once place it out of our power to ascribe to him any definite attribute whatever. To begin with, an absolute Being cannot be the source of nature, cannot indeed be a cause at all. "A cause cannot, as such, be absolute; the Absolute cannot, as such, be a cause. The cause, as such, exists only in relation to the effect. On the other hand, the conception of the Absolute involves a possible existence out of all relation." Again, an absolute Being cannot have consciousness, personality, or any of those qualities which involve personality. "The Absolute cannot be conceived



as conscious, neither can it be conceived as unconscious; it cannot be conceived as complex, neither can it be conceived as simple; it cannot be conceived by difference, neither can it be conceived by absence of difference; it cannot be identified with the universe, neither can it be distinguished from it." And an infinite Being in the same way cannot have attributes, since the attribution of a quality necessarily implies limitation which is the negation of infinity.

In this kind of sword-play Mansel had few equals; and as logical propositions his views admit of no refutation. But as it is not easy for those who are untrained in the schools of metaphysic to follow such swift and brilliant fencing, I shall prefer to put a parallel argument to that of Mansel in simpler language.

The first article of the prayer-book states that God is of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. And these words do no doubt convey a definite meaning. They have a basis in experience such as that which I have sketched. But if they are regarded, not as they should be, as a mere rough attempt to sum up certain facts of human life, but as they should not be, as logical propositions, entirely and absolutely true, they cannot stand for a moment.

A Being of infinite goodness must hate evil; a Being of infinite wisdom must know how to destroy it; a Being of infinite power must be able to take the necessary steps to that end. Therefore, the existence of evil is inconsistent with the existence of such a Being. But evil exists, according to the universal opinion of Christendom, and so our creed becomes hopelessly inconsistent. Again, goodness consists in the conquest of tendency to evil. With infinite power the conquest of tendency to evil becomes impossible, for where there is no possibility of resistance there can be no conquest. Therefore infinite power and infinite goodness cannot be united.

Again, let us take the three divine infinities separately. Infinite power: does this include my power of will? If it does, I as a responsible being do not exist, and to punish or reward me would be monstrous. If it does not, the power is not infinite, since it is limited by my will and that of other men.

Infinite wisdom : does this include a knowledge of all that shall hereafter come to pass ? If it does, free will in man is a purely delusive show, since if the future can be known it must be governed by rigid unvariable law. If it does not, a wisdom uncertain as to the future is not infinite. Infinite goodness : here we have simply a contradiction in terms, for goodness is necessarily a thing of limitation and of struggle. We may easily see this by looking at its constituent parts. Chastity implies body parts and passions ; courage implies a fear of danger to be overcome ; unselfishness implies a self which is evil, and so forth. If the parts of virtue imply limitation so does the whole.

Nor does it help us in the least to say that when we apply to God the attribute of goodness, we mean something different from what we mean when we apply it to men. For it is quite certain that by goodness we either mean human goodness or nothing. If we do not mean by goodness what we are used to as human virtue, there can be no meaning in saying that he is of infinite goodness. If when we say that God is infinitely powerful and wise, we mean that his power and wisdom surpass our utmost imagination, we speak wisely. If when we say that God is infinitely good, we mean that he is in the world of conduct invariably on the side of goodness, we again speak wisely. But we must not use the phrases as counters in a game of intellectual speculation, or as true independently of human experience.

The contradictions in which metaphysical theology is at every step involved arise, according to the views here set forth, from the fact that theological propositions or dogmas are not speculatively valid, but are merely the intellectual statement of inward experiences. There is nothing to prevent the expressions in doctrine of different sides of experience from being inconsistent with one another.

A most instructive parallel is furnished by the history of myth, of which we shall later treat.<sup>1</sup> We shall see that myth also, being a direct embodiment of experience, tends to inconsistency. A myth embodying one fact of experience is often inconsistent with a myth embodying another fact of

<sup>1</sup> Chapter IX.

experience. And the two myths may for a time live contentedly side by side. But the rationalists and the makers of systems cannot rest content with contradictions. They labour to produce a harmony. When myths are formed by priests or by logographers into a mythology, they cut and prune the separate myths, fitting them into an edifice which serves certain purposes, enabling Pagans to think reasonably of their deities.

The same difficulty is met in a similar way in the case of doctrine. Those who are not troubled with intellectual doubts easily accept doctrines inconsistent one with the other if they are alike based on experience. The educated theologian has been accustomed to try by shaping and cutting doctrines to fit them according to some preconceived principles of his own into a theological system. Some such systems have gone to pieces very soon; some have survived for ages and had enormous effect for good or for evil on mankind. Unless or until the relative character of truth is recognised, systems the main theses of which are *à priori* and based rather on reason than experience are a necessity, and well worthy of the labour of the highest human intellects. But since Kant struck away the basis of all metaphysical construction by proving that the reasonings on which it is founded end in insoluble contradictions, the case is changed. Henceforth doctrinal constructions should be based not on *à priori* assumptions but on the facts of human nature, as determined by inductive psychology. The edifices may be less imposing, but they will be safer; and they may, like their predecessors, be adorned with art and embodied in poetry.

In the illegitimate use of legitimate doctrine some of the chief offenders have been the doctors of the Church. But they by no means stand alone. Many modern writers who have small pretensions to orthodoxy have been almost as much to blame. Many and many a good man has persuaded himself that the will of God is fixed and immutable, and that therefore prayer cannot have any efficacy; and under the spell of a mere pedantic logic has starved his spiritual life. No doubt the laws of the physical world are, so far as we know, changeless, but it would be absurd to say that the working of God in the

human heart goes on in fixed and changeless fashion. We all find by experience that this is not the case. But men fix in their minds the speculative view that the whole future must lie open to God and so must be rigidly determined. They often do not see that this view is just as fatal logically to the possibility of free will in man as it is to the efficacy of prayer.

To pray that the tide should not rise, that a tree when cut down should not wither, and the like, would no doubt be useless. Such prayer is condemned in the narrative of our Master's temptation as a tempting of God. But in all cases in which a human element is involved, prayer becomes legitimate. If we are in a ship filling with water, and pray that it may not sink, it is precisely like praying that stones may be made bread. But if in the natural fashion of weak and foolish man we pray that amid the wreck our lives may be preserved, it is impossible to say that God may not put wisdom into our own hearts or desire to save us into the hearts of others, so that we may be rescued and not die. And if we can rise to a higher level and merely pray that we may be preserved from evil whether in life or death, such a prayer is a direct appeal to a power of which we have experience.

But theorists say that God's will must be best, and that if any prayer of ours be granted, it will lead to what is worse, instead of what is better. But here again we have mere pedantry and assumption. Of God's will in the abstract we know nothing; we only know God's will as revealed to us in consciousness and experience. In experience, as we all know, the best does not always take place. And God's will as revealed to us does not shower blessings upon those who do not work for them and pray for them. These, however, are deep matters into which we cannot now go further.

A very great part of the religious difficulties of educated people arises simply because they do not look at facts in their spiritual life, but start from some *à priori* and unwarranted notions, and fall into disgust and despair because they find them not suited to the facts of life. In ancient days men followed the same course in regard to the physical world; but science could not take a start until they had learned that the first thing was to use their senses in accurate observation,

before proceeding to construct theories and schemes of the universe.

These *à priori* assumptions have no legitimate ground, either in experience or in reason. It is true that God's will, as shown in the order of inanimate nature, is, so far as we know, fixed and changeless. But when we turn to the phenomena of biology, we find evolution in place of changeless order, and it is at least a maintainable view that in that evolution we may trace purpose. And when we proceed to examine consciousness, we find quite another order of phenomena than that which prevails in inanimate nature; we find the will of God progressively revealed, imperfectly effectual, limited by human folly and wickedness, pleading sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully with the children of men. On the other hand, if we turn from experience to reason, and try to discover what the nature of God's will is in itself, we cannot be sure that it is in relation to the mere human condition of time, and therefore it is equally risky to call it mutable or immutable, since mutability involves time.

There is, however, a large body of Christians who hold that although objective and absolute knowledge of God cannot be reached by any straining of the human intellect, it comes to us by direct revelation from God himself. What is not possible to mere man is possible, as they think, to the Christian, because he can draw from deeper wells than human.

I am not concerned to discuss from the purely *à priori* standpoint the question whether it would be possible that God should reveal in human words some knowledge of the divine nature as it exists out of relation to man and to the world. As man would have to interpret any words given by God, he must needs interpret them in the forms of human thought and experience, and so drag them down from heaven to earth. But however that may be, it is the fact that God has not been pleased thus to reveal himself apart from the data of human experience, but rather always in terms of it.

History from first to last is full of the self-revelation of God to men. I shall endeavour, according to my ability, to sketch the nature and ways of this gradual revelation. But from first to last it is purely and entirely relative. It is no



revelation to beings in general, but to human beings, and to human beings of a particular age and a particular nation, although what is highest in it is also most general, and belongs to man as man. And those great religious teachers who have been the channel of divine revelation have not usually supposed themselves to be stating abstract truths as to the nature of God. They have all had a message for man. Out of those messages it is the philosophy of man which has made great constructions of absolute theology.

This will be clearest if we consider the teaching of the Founder of Christianity, so far as it is known to us. Every Christian will allow that if we learn to think of God as Jesus Christ thought of him, we shall do all that human nature can do towards a right knowledge of the divine. And it is a well-known fact that the nearer we approach the Source of Christianity, the less do we find of speculative divinity.

It has been observed that in the synoptic Gospels there is in no case a reference to God of any abstract quality. "Your Father in Heaven" is the ordinary phrase employed in speaking of God. God is no doubt also spoken of as *one* and as *good*: one as opposed to the many gods of heathen nations; good as opposed to human imperfection. But there is nothing in these phrases which passes experience. In the Fourth Gospel we have a statement which may be said to contain the seeds of speculative theology, "God is a spirit;" but the phrase comes in such a connection that it must be very doubtful whether it does not belong rather to the author of the Gospel than to his Master. And even this phrase may be taken as a pure summary of experience. In none of the Gospels do we find any speculative theological lore. Jesus does not speak, like good Richard Baxter, of the "Eternal, incomprehensible and invisible God, infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness." It is true that philosophic speculation can evolve out of passages in the Gospels a scheme, or any number of schemes, of speculative divinity. And it must even be allowed that such schemes have served in the past to build up religion and to keep men in the ways of righteousness. But it is open to any one to question the processes by which current theology has been constructed out of revelation. And these processes



have been shown, by criticism, to be sometimes illegitimate. The misfortune is that those who discover the unsatisfactory character of speculative theology often proceed to reject the Christian creed as a thing without basis and meaning. Among intelligent laymen in our days this procedure is quite usual, and any views of religion, to find favour with them, must be independent of creed. Yet in the absence of solid and clear intellectual foundation, no school of religion can be lasting or stable. For this reason the reconstruction of creed upon some other basis than speculative theology has become in our days an urgent necessity.

It will by this time be abundantly clear that what we are criticising is not religion, and not theology, but a certain mixture of theology and metaphysics which has gradually arisen in the Church, taking its origin soon after the end of the first century, and constantly growing and changing through the ages of Augustine, Duns Scotus, Luther, until the rise of the critical philosophy, which has so changed our mental atmosphere that the growth of so many centuries can grow no longer. The tree must needs fall, but from its roots new and vigorous saplings may come forth which may in time become as imposing and live as long as their predecessor.

## CHAPTER VI

### RELATIVE RELIGION

RETURNING to consider doctrine in relation to the religious needs of human nature, we at once see that our argument, though fitted to bear a superstructure, is not in itself a construction. Of course, since religions and sects differ so widely among themselves, it is clear that what belongs to man as man in religion cannot be very extensive. It is surprising on how small a ledge of doctrine a great religion may be built, but unless it were surmounted by a noble dwelling, the mere ledge would be a very unsatisfactory resting-place for men. That which binds men to religions is not the fundamental assumptions, which usually lie hidden out of sight, but the positive doctrines.

Passing from religion in general to Christianity in particular, we see at once that what is most striking in that supreme religion is not so much what is common to Christianity with Islam, Buddhism, and other great religions, but rather what is peculiar to it. It is for this that missionaries have journeyed and martyrs have died. It is this which supports the life and comforts the death of thousands in every generation.

But the doctrines and hopes which make up the framework of religion as it exists in Europe and America cannot be justified by the direct appeal to human nature. In the language which I have already used they have not universal subjective validity. Objectivity they have in the highest degree, if we are right in regarding objectivity as born not in

the speculative faculties, but in those of action, in will, and emotion. It is for that reason that any attempt to impugn them arouses indignation and anger. Men do not grow heated about that which they can rigidly prove, but about that which speculatively they cannot prove and yet must hold. No one was ever burnt for asserting, or for denying, that the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles. But hundreds have perished in agony in order to maintain what was not matter of intellectual conviction, but doctrine necessary to conduct.

We come here upon truths which it is exceedingly difficult to set forth in ordinary language without misleading the unwary, and disgusting the enthusiastic. When we say that religious doctrine is mostly relative and not absolute, we are liable to be represented as saying that in matters of doctrine there is no real right and wrong, but that every one is at liberty to accept as much or as little as he is disposed. This is a hideous and fatal misinterpretation of our views. Because doctrine is more closely bound up with life than with thought, its truth becomes a thousandfold more important. Right doctrine is, as the Church has always maintained, a matter of life and death; but the test of rightness is not merely intellectual, but mainly practical. And when we say that in most doctrine there is an element of illusion, we are liable to be represented as saying that doctrine is full of delusion, and cannot retain its hold on educated people. This again is a complete misrepresentation. It must be observed that if we use the word illusion in this connexion, we use it not at all as a synonym for delusion, but to express something which may sometimes be pernicious, but as often is a divinely appointed means of progress.

It is true that the dictionaries scarcely justify this use of the word illusion. Language is made for common everyday purposes, and does not readily take finer shades of thought. Matthew Arnold preferred to call doctrine intermixed with intellectual error by the German name of *Aberglaube*; but this word is quite as liable to misunderstanding as the word illusion. We might invent new words, like Kant and his followers; but the genius of the English language seems

opposed to this proceeding. We must take our chance of misinterpretation, reducing that chance, so far as we can, by varying our phrases.

It has been observed by those who have carefully studied human life that if men saw the ends of their pursuits from the beginning, the very sinews of action would be cut. From childhood to manhood, from manhood to old age, we are occupied in the pursuit of various ends, always believing that in attaining them we shall secure permanent happiness. But when we reach our ends we find that they are not so satisfactory as we supposed. Something else is necessary to complete or to supplement them, and away we go on a fresh chase, which ends in a like disappointment. If we cease to aim at something beyond, we cease to live; and yet all our experience shows that happiness is not permanently attained by the securing of the successive objects which stimulate us to incessant activity.

The practical illusions of life have been the theme of moralists and of satirists since the human race attained to reflection. And yet to men in whom the blood is warm and energy keen, moralists and satirists will speak in vain. They will only be listened to in days of weariness, and during the reactions which follow on exertion. As the kitten plays and the lark sings, so healthy human nature will energise in the direction of that which attracts it. "Illusion is the poetry of life," and not only the poetry, but the motive spring; and the nation which has the most illusions is frequently the most energetic and aspiring.

Great preachers have laboured to reconcile the facts of illusion with the existence of a divine providence and a God who loves truth. Perhaps no preacher has written better on the subject than F. W. Robertson, in his sermon on the *Illusiveness of Life*. "We are led through life as we are allured upon a journey. Could a man see his route before him—a flat, straight road, unbroken by bush or tree or eminence, with the sun's heat burning down upon it, stretched out in dreary monotony—he could scarcely find energy to begin his task; but the uncertainty of what may be seen beyond the next turn keeps expectation alive." "It is thus

that God has led on His world. He has conducted it as a father leads his child, when the path homeward lies over many a dreary league. He suffers him to beguile the thought of time, by turning aside to pluck now and then a flower, to chase now a butterfly; the butterfly is crushed, the flower fades, but the child is so much nearer home, invigorated and full of health, and scarcely wearied yet." "We do not preach that all is disappointment—the dreary creed of sentimentalism; but we preach that *nothing* here is disappointment, if rightly understood." "God's promises are true, though illusive, far truer than we at first take them to be."

In all the justifications of illusion there is a tone of melancholy. And this is natural enough. For no one while under the power of illusions wants to justify them, but is content to live in them. When disillusion comes, however, it is likely to pass into pessimism and despair unless there be a justification. In a time of self-consciousness like ours, illusion is of far less power than in younger and more unsophisticated ages. We are easily discouraged, "and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." And there are no steps backward. We must find a remedy, not by returning to what is behind, but by pressing on to that which is before, and bidding thought to seek for a remedy for thought. When childhood disappears in the awkwardness of youth, we may regret the change, but the remedy lies with time, and the consummation of the process already begun, not in a second childhood.

The thing on which Robertson wishes to insist appears to be this. From the ethical point of view, and the view of religion, the only results of any true value in life are the formation of character within, and the accomplishment of the divine will in the world and in society. Yet if these ends were set directly before men in their pure and naked spirituality, they would not attract any except those who had attained a high grade in the spiritual life. To persuade men to pursue what is really good, the divine wisdom has hidden it under the mask of a more attractive seeming good, which is what we call illusion. Hence the illusiveness of life. But the deception is not of the kind by which evil men lure their

victims to destruction, but of the kind by which wise parents induce their children to do what it is their duty and their health to do, which yet they would never be brought to do except by stern necessity or gentle attraction.

There are illusions of the intellect as well as illusions of the imagination, and it is with these that we have to deal in the present chapter. As men naturally suppose happiness to be a thing external to us to be attained and grasped, so they naturally suppose truth to be an external thing to be reached and held. I mean, of course, not the mere truths of science and fact, which are of a more definite kind, but truths of ethical and religious character, truth in matters beyond sense. And as in the result happiness turns out to be a thing not grasped from without, but developed from within, so it is with the higher truth. Such truth is really gathered from within, not acquired from without; it is gained by action rather than by intellect. Truth which those who set it forth regard as final, and which each successive generation thinks to be won for all time, is really a guide in life and a basis for the formation of higher character. We seek objective truth as we seek objective happiness, and not only are our faculties exercised and trained in the search, but we also attain relative truth, truth as seen through the coloured glasses of our age and our school.

We are told by Professor Stanton<sup>1</sup> that it is now generally recognised, even by orthodox critics, that in the history of the Jewish race we may discern a good deal of divinely appointed illusion. "Illusion, followed by the discipline of experience and disappointment, played no unimportant part in the formation and definition of the clearest Messianic hope of Israel." And orthodox critics may in time find themselves able to go a little further, and to allow that illusion is one of the constant accompaniments of all religious life and progress. The reception of the best and most fruitful religious ideas does not immediately convey accurate knowledge either of the present or the future, nor does it exempt from the limitations and faultiness of existing schools of systematic thought.

Some able writers, such as Dr. Hatch, and to some extent

<sup>1</sup> *Jewish and Christian Messiah*, p. 97.



even Matthew Arnold, have written of the evolution of set schemes of doctrine out of life and feeling as if it were a process of mere degeneration and decay, and wholly to be regretted. And when we compare the Athanasian Creed, or even the earlier creeds of the Christian Church, with the life of our Founder, and the depth and simplicity of the Sermon on the Mount, it is hard not to share their views to some extent. It is also certain that religious life and passion belong to the great, the formative ages of spiritual life, the creeds to the times of less vitality and shallower feeling. But human nature being what it is, the formation of creeds is the necessary sequel of every religious awakening. And the creeds of the past, the creeds which still survive amongst many of us, contain a large element of illusion.

It is usually the part of a wise man not to attempt to destroy illusions, whether in life or in belief. Let those who are under their sway so remain, so long as illusions will bring them satisfaction. But when illusion is once recognised as such, it becomes necessary to seek for a remedy. Robertson, in the passage above quoted, suggests a remedy for the despair which comes of the discovery that practical life is full of illusion. Is any such remedy to be found also in matters of belief? Can we show to those who have discovered the illusiveness of their traditional creed, that nevertheless much of it may be justified in the highest courts of consciousness? Undoubtedly we can.

The conservative principle which we seek is to be found in the distinction first clearly insisted on by Kant between speculative and practical reason, between knowledge in matters of sense, and conviction in matters which transcend sense: in a word, between truth of fact and truth of idea.

What truth of fact, scientific verity, is, every one in these days knows well. What ideal truth is men do not realise with the same clearness and certainty. The sudden expansion of scientific knowledge has left us materialist, and though the laws of conduct and of belief are as important to us as to any of our ancestors, we do not feel the importance as did many of them.

Yet it is very easy to illustrate the nature of ideal truth.

An interesting phase of life is lived out in a street of London or of Paris. If a plain accurate account of what took place is written, we call it biography, and expect strict conformity to fact. But instead of writing biography, our author may change names and disguise localities, though strictly adhering to the order of events. Does his work become a lie? Surely not; but he has taken the first step towards ideal truth. Perhaps, again, wishing to avoid personalities, he disguises and changes also the course of events, translating it into another plane. He has now in a sense given up truth to fact. But he is still under the dominion of ideal truth. His tale is bound to conform to the conditions and possibilities of human life, to the facts of human nature, else it becomes monstrous. Here we have ideal truth of one kind, truth in fiction. Bentham used to say that "all poetry is misrepresentation," but it is obvious that on the contrary good poetry must be true, either to a lower or to a higher range of realities.

But ideal truth exists not only in reference to human history, but also in reference to action and the springs of action. When a certain course of action makes for the continuance and the progress of mankind, or of any group of men, then the beliefs incorporated with that course have ideal truth. They are in accord with the conditions of our life in the world; they fit our surroundings, and are a part of the harmony of human life. When these beliefs do not strictly accord with scientific outward fact, it is doubtless a weakness in them, and a seed of destruction; yet for a time, at all events, the truth which they represent may be higher and more important than the truths which they contradict.

If we look at human life in what may be termed a physiological aspect, studying it as we should study a living organism, we shall see how both kinds of truth suit our surroundings, and how the conformity to either gives advantage in the struggle for existence. To judge rightly of the facts of the visible universe, to rightly connect cause with effect in chemistry and in biology, obviously brings success in the battle of life. To cherish the views and the beliefs as regards things outside sense which go with and belong to nobler, more energetic, and more manly courses of action, must, if man is

progressive, on the whole be expedient, and tend to the good of the possessors. To one battling with physical nature, the farmer, the artisan, or the engineer, the truth of science may be nearest, and may at least seem most important. But to other men, to whom conduct is the most important part of life, and who are not immediately wrestling with the secrets of nature, the ideal truth which helps conduct will be far more important than mere scientific truth.

Religious beliefs necessarily contain more of ideal than of scientific or strictly historic truth. And thus it may easily come to pass, that although a given belief contains a certain amount of intellectual error, yet it cannot be denied without the introduction of a larger and more serious error. This is the case even in practical life. When a man is aiming at some success in life from which he expects great satisfaction, the monitor who shows him that the satisfaction will not be solid really often leads him into error, for the satisfaction will accompany the activity, though not in the way expected. And this is quite as much the case as regards belief and intellect. To many Christians there have only been possible two views in regard to the Bible: either that it is the word of God and infallible, or the word of man and an imposture. And to such, the abandonment of the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture would be to descend to a lower level of truth, as well as to lose a guide of life. In the same way, it is certainly nearer the truth to believe that God is in his eternal being virtuous with human virtue, than to deny the divine goodness altogether.

If the views as to the all sufficiency of truth which prevail in some of our scientific schools be founded, and if truth be regarded as the precise correspondence between thought and experience, then such phenomena as the spread of a noble religion by views which are demonstrably false seem fatal to the notion of a providential governance of the world. But the views mentioned are but a modern rendering of the false Platonic doctrine of the predominance of thought over feeling and will, a doctrine which is itself a good instance of illusion, since, though contrary to the facts of human nature, it is yet necessary to the full development of scientific thought.

If thinking men had fully realised in all ages the narrow limits of thought, we should not have grown as we have grown in the understanding of the universe.

If we examine the doctrines which have contributed to human progress, we shall, I believe, discover that even when they do not correspond to the truth of experience, yet they represent the negation of what is even less true than themselves. The belief current among the earliest Christians in a speedy Second Advent has been shown by experience not to correspond with fact. Yet at bottom it was but an exaggerated and passionate expression of the superiority of the spiritual to the material in life. To a world sunk in indulgence and materialism it proclaimed the evanescence of that which could be seen, the importance of that which could not be seen. And although Christ did not come, as his followers expected, in the clouds of heaven, he came none the less really to reign on earth with growing sway, while the Roman Empire crumbled to dust.

If we try to realise the state of mind of men at the time, we shall see that those who denied the Second Advent would be in almost all cases not the men who saw truth more clearly, but the men who saw it less clearly. Few indeed would reject the belief on the ground that "the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation." But many would reject it because it seemed impossible that to a Galilean peasant such power should be given from above that he could overturn the vast fabric of the Roman Empire. And many would reject it because the notion of the coming of such a judge would be intolerable to them. Thus at the time those who rejected the belief in the Second Advent would almost necessarily be more in the wrong than those who received it. And that in this and in a hundred other cases a divine impulse was mixed with intellectual error is but in accordance with all the history of revelation.

The belief in a speedy Advent wore itself slowly out, without producing a violent reaction. But there are many beliefs which partake largely of illusion, yet which may be for a time keystones of morality. In dealing with such one is often at a great loss. Perhaps the best precedent which can be

followed is that set by Jesus, according to our accounts, in dealing with the Jewish Sabbath. The doctrine of the Sabbath, connected in the minds of the Jews with the tale of the resting Creator, was one of the main props of Jewish morality. Rather than break the Sabbath, Jewish armies had allowed themselves to be massacred. To touch the institution was to touch a leading nerve, so to speak, of the Jewish community. It was to run the risk of undermining the system which made the Jews as regards religion superior to the surrounding peoples. Yet as regards the Sabbath, Jesus himself is represented as having introduced the relative point of view. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." He puts as a basis for the doctrine, in place of a divine command without relation to human nature, the facts of man's religious needs. He transposes the whole doctrine from the absolute to the relative key. But in so doing he is careful not to sanction a hasty rejection of it. It stands on a new basis, but it still stands. The difference is that what is made for man is subject to modification according to man's needs and the demands of the religious life.

It is precisely this principle of the Master which the upholders of relative religion propose to carry out. The carrying out involves grave dangers, but he did not shrink from them, and we should not. We have a positive duty to truth; though it is also a duty of charity to strive to prevent as far as possible the hard and naked truth from doing harm to honest believers.

It is very dangerous, often disastrous, to attack as mere error the set of religious doctrines which a man has inherited or acquired. The attack, if successful, will bring in scepticism ten times for one time in which it merely converts to another set of religious doctrines. There is infinitely less danger in criticising, not a scheme of doctrine, but merely the way in which it is held. Such attack will have no effect at all on those who are uneducated or wanting in the philosophic faculty. It is ordained in the constitution of the world that those who require intellectual illusion will cling to it. Just as the young and warm-blooded cleave to practical illusions, even in spite of experience, so those who are young and un-



trained in thought will cling to intellectual illusions in spite of argument. And those who accept the scheme of experimental religion can reconstruct their beliefs on a different level.

So long as the mind remains, in the matter of religious knowledge, in the absolute key, if we may use that expression, any sort of disillusion must bring pain and confusion. And it is partly because men's minds are usually in that key that we see around us in the religious world so much scepticism and so much indifference. Education and culture necessarily destroy the foundations of absolute religion, so that it daily withers more and more. Hence so many of the educated drift into sceptical indifference; so many strive to keep religion like a hothouse flower, which they dare not expose to the cold winds and buffetings of the world; so many try to keep the principles of faith, while giving up anything in the nature of a creed. Hence to many education and knowledge, which should open the doors of wider happiness, prove the source of misery and irresolution.

But those who boldly realise that religious doctrine has reference far less to speculation than to practice, and that a certain amount of subjectivity necessarily clings to it, escape from this painful position. They will seek earnestly to reduce this subjectivity as far as they can, certainly to eliminate from it all of a merely personal character, and all that belongs to narrow surroundings. But what belongs to man as man, what belongs to the higher races of men, and especially what belongs to our worthiest predecessors in religious thought, has a sacred claim upon us. Being men, as the Greeks would have said, we must think in human fashion. And being Christians or Englishmen, it is as such that we must feel and think. The reception of this doctrine or of that is not the attainment of an eternal truth, but it is taking a peep of some revelation of God, or of man in relation to him. And those who refuse to accept the doctrine suited to their mind and heart run the danger of closing against themselves the doors of the better life.

And that the acceptance of a relative point of view need not mean the eclipse of faith may easily be shown. The idealists have proved beyond the possibility of reply that our



knowledge of the external world is relative: that is, that our experience of it is not and cannot be, as we suppose, direct and objective. I have already maintained, in a previous chapter, that it is made objective not by sense or intellect, but by will and feeling. Our knowledge of it is relative in just the same way as our knowledge of religious truth is relative. Yet the idealists, so long as they are sane, and mix in the world, do not differ from other men in their practical convictions as to the world. The curtain of intellectual doubt, hung up in the background of the mind, in no way stops their free outlook, or stands in the way of vigorous action. In the same way may those who regard doctrine as relative, yet keep their lives in accord with what they accept as best for them in it.

It must be allowed that there is an obvious difficulty in passing from the absolute to the relative point of view in religion, and in placing the test of religious truth rather in will than in intellect. For in matters of science there is a definite true and false for man as man. What is true for A is true for B also. Whether two sides of a triangle are greater than the third, whether gold is heavier than iron, and the like, are not matters on which variety of opinion is tolerable. In these cases one view is right, and all which differ from it are wrong. Certainly there might be advantages of a kind, if religious truth were of this character; but in the constitution of the world it is otherwise. There is no human possibility of framing a scheme of speculative religious truth thus objective.

If, however, the test of doctrine be practical, does it not follow that it may be the duty of A to accept a certain belief and pursue a certain course of action, and at the same time the duty of B to thwart him, or even to expel him from the community, for such beliefs and conduct?

To some extent this is the case in an imperfect world. Our primary duty is to do what we conceive to be the will of God, and in so doing we may sometimes come into collision with others quite as conscientious and devoted as ourselves. No one can live in the world, and no one can read history, without very soon finding this out. But in proportion as men take a higher and nobler line, and more completely subordinate

their selfish impulses to the higher voice, their purposes will become purer and nobler, and their chance of collision with others like-minded smaller. It is the "because I am I" which is the cause of most of the painful struggles and rivalries of the world.

It is the pursuit by individuals of their obvious and immediate good which is usually harmful to society. In pursuing their own highest good, in following the voice of conscience, men benefit society. For we cannot suppose that the individual is the work of one creative power, and society of another, so that there should be a clashing of purpose between the two. Our spirit and conscience come from the same source whence society originates. So in obeying the voice of conscience, and of the Deity who speaks in conscience, we must needs be doing the best we can for those about us. In the case of a great machine, the due working of the whole depends upon the proper fulfilment of function by each separate wheel and valve and bar, according to the design and purpose of the engineer. In the same way the good working of a society depends upon the good working of the individuals of whom the society is made up. There is a kind of pre-existing harmony in the matter, which has to be worked out in practice.

No religious writer would maintain that all needs and aspirations which have a religious character are of necessity justified, and necessarily lead to goodness and truth. This is, like all the phases of the problem of the existence of evil, a difficult matter to deal with, but it is necessary at least to mention it. Wherever in the world there is a good thing, there is also an evil thing which imitates it, and tries to pass under cover of likeness to it. If virtue is a mean between two vices, both of these vices try to pass as different sides of the virtue. Rashness calls itself courage, and sentimental weakness calls itself charity; prudery calls itself purity. So the solemn experiences of the higher life, and the noble impulses imparted by God to the soul, are mocked by a host of feelings and impulses which imitate them as angels of darkness imitate the angels of light. Nor is there any easy outward or external means of discriminating between the truth and the

imposture. From the point of view of natural history we might call them closely allied, just as a lovely flower and a poisonous weed may be from the botanical point of view species of the same genus.

It is not for reason to discern between the spirits or trace the imperceptible line between faith and credulity, between religion and superstition. The line only becomes clear from practical working. That the Christian who does his best, and tries to purge his natural darkness by heavenly light, learns to discern between good and evil in the impulses which come from without has always been a commonplace in the Christian Church since the days of the Founder, who declared that if any man would do the will of God he should be taught what that will was, that obedience is the true organ of spiritual discernment. It is an intellectual paradox and a practical truism, like most of the theses of the higher life. However formidable in theory, the difficulty of discernment does not occupy a great space in the practical life of healthy men.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INSPIRATION OF HISTORY

THUS far I have dealt with the statics of religious belief. Taking man as he exists in civilised society, with developed powers and feelings, I have tried to show how the exercise of those powers and the very existence of those feelings lead him to the conviction of the existence and working in conduct of a divine Power. But religion, as we find it in the world, is not thus mainly a matter of personal revelation to individuals, save in noteworthy cases. The great mass of our religious beliefs we do not directly form from experience, but inherit from our ancestors, and find already embodied in religious books and in the formularies of churches. Religion is in fact rather revealed to the race by slow degrees of historical progress than given to each individual in the course of living. All striking and powerful individuals have certain beliefs, and those the deepest seated of all, which belong to them personally and are the basis of their higher life. But such convictions, even in case of the few, can be but a small part of their creed. And with the great majority of mankind, the basis as well as the superstructure of religion is received from others by inheritance, example, and teaching.

We have, therefore, to turn from psychology to history, and to investigate the nature of this revelation to the race. And if we do so, we shall at once find that our new investigation runs parallel to our previous study. The analogies between the facts of religious belief in the individual and the facts of religious belief in the race are extraordinarily close and most suggestive.

By religious and irreligious alike in these days history is acknowledged as an evolution. But to the religious it is an evolution which takes place in accordance with what may best be spoken of in our imperfect language as purpose, and under the direction of divine control. All might agree that good and evil impulses mould the development of societies, but according to the Christian view the good impulses come from God.

It would lead us too far were we to try to discover whence men acquire a conviction that history has a meaning, and social evolution a tendency. There may be some who are led to that view by the study of history itself, and who find such a hypothesis necessary to its understanding. Far more people make the discovery in the course of living, finding that their own lives, and the lives of friends, are enigmas, and remain enigmas until they light on this way of interpreting them; and still more probably never had to discover the religious basis of society, because they never doubted it. They were taught in childhood that the world was under divine governance, and never felt disposed to doubt it, except in those gray moments which come now and then in the lives of all, when one might doubt of all truth and virtue, and leave "not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean."

A firm and abiding belief in the divine control of human progress is, in most cases, the result of a certainty of the reality of divine inspiration in the heart. There is nothing like experience for producing conviction. And men naturally feel that the God who has guided themselves will also surely guide the society, the church, the nation of which they are members. In the light shed by the facts of conduct we learn to follow the gradual transformation of society by the reception of divine ideas.

Some philosophic historic schools have made up their minds that God cannot work in history, because, if it were so, a science of history would be impossible. But this surely is a cobweb which may easily be brushed aside. No *exact* science of history is possible. We shall never be able to foretell the future of a nation as we foretell an eclipse. But looking on history in the past, we can range its phenomena and see its

drift : first, because human nature is, in the main, invariable, or but slowly variable ; and, second, because the divine control of history is not fortuitous and erratic, but continuous, though purpose can be but dimly and occasionally traced. For a theorist to decide that, with a view to the convenience of his theories, the working of divine ideas must be banished from the world, seems an extraordinary piece of presumption. It is but a step further in the same direction to decide that the will and the activity of rulers and of men of genius have no effect on the course of history. Those who would expel God from history must also, to be consistent, expel all plan and purpose of man from history. The inner necessity, and inward self-determination, of which we have spoken in earlier chapters, bear fruit in practice, and are continually affecting the course of history. All history is indeed in one aspect only the register of successive acts of human volition. Therefore, any attempt to construct an external science of history on the basis of statistics, of climatic influence, of race-tendency, must needs bring very imperfect results, omitting precisely the things which most need explanation, and proceeding upon analogies which are utterly misleading. It is much like working out chemical problems by mathematical methods ; perhaps still more like trying to compose a piece of music on some scheme of mathematical progressions and proportions. And this is true not only of the course of history, but of every investigation built on the ground of human nature. And it is truest of all in matters of ethics and of religion, since these are above all things purely human, inward, and practical, and in the smallest degree under the dominion of physical law.

The history of races and nations is much like the history of individuals writ large. And the course of ethical and religious development in a nation is closely parallel to its course in an individual. The individual is in the main controlled and directed by forces over which he has no power, the forces of inherited tendency and of circumstance. But yet each man has within him the possibility of rising to a higher or sinking to a lower level, as he follows the better or the worse impulses. So also the nation has but a limited power of self-determination. Its evolution has followed a definite



line, and must continue to move on in the same direction. No nation can safely break with its past history, and follow an entirely new line in morals or religion. The degree of freedom in this respect varies greatly, it is true, from nation to nation, and from age to age. Some peoples, of which the Chinese have been the extreme type, change very slowly and seem unable to absorb new ideas. Other peoples, of whom a kindred race, the Japanese, offer a good type, seem able to make a complete revolution in feelings and ideals within a short period. If we consider Europe, we shall observe that ages of change, and ages of stagnation, or of reaction, succeed one another according to laws which we cannot trace. Probably at no time in history have social and religious as well as material and industrial changes proceeded so fast as in our own days. The philosophy of change should therefore have special attractions for us.

The principle of progress and of change consists in impulses or tendencies surging up, we do not see whence, into the ways of human life. Just as in the spring time the sap begins to rise in the trunks of the trees ready to take various forms, and to develop into bark and leaf and flower and fruit, so a formless tendency or purpose makes itself felt in the hearts of communities. And by degrees it works itself out. Its results occupy all the fields of human activity. In the field of politics it crystallises into institutions; in the field of conduct into customs; in the intellectual field into systems of thought and doctrine. It passes constantly into new manifestations which leave permanent marks on the history of the world.

And as in the case of individual lives, so in the case of communities divine inspiration may be regarded in two ways. Firstly, as a revelation to the community of the facts of their relations to the powers which rule the world, and a consequent perception that only so long as those relations are in a normal and healthy condition will the common life be happy and prosperous. And, secondly, as an impulse or a succession of impulses towards the better life, towards purer modes of living and the pursuit of higher purposes. Sometimes the enlightenment may come first and the impulse afterwards. But more

often the impulse comes at least as early as the perception, so that the life of peoples develops in a higher direction before they are aware of the eternal fitness of things which makes that direction higher. Inspiration and revelation are two sides of the same progress; the revelation is first in order of logic, but in order of time the inspiration, at least in a vague and tentatory shape, is usually the earlier.

It is through the personal life and character of inspired individuals, and through the national life which belongs to societies, working from within outwards, that the divine ideas gradually permeate the world, and create a new order in society. And as the individual does not lose but gain in character and will by following the higher light, so communities, by receiving the divine ideas, gain a more intense national feeling and life.

It is probable that the divine ideas may be traced in their work not only in the world of humanity, but also in that of nature. According to Mr. A. Wallace, whose authority in such a matter ought surely to be great, "a superior intelligence has guided the physical development of man in a definite direction and for a special purpose." And there are eminent biologists who have extended this view from the physical frame of man to that of animals and of plants. They hold that though natural selection is undoubtedly the order of nature, natural selection is guided in certain directions rather than others by a superhuman wisdom, and that not in the case of man only, but of other dwellers in the world, the changes which occur show special adaptation to needs yet far off in the future. If so, the ideas of God must play a great part in all biological development. But I cannot venture to pursue the subject, because I am not a biologist, but a student of mankind. And indeed, if our regard is confined to man, the task before us is still one of quite sufficient magnitude.

In the history of nations, as in the history of individuals, there are moral crises, when the direction of the whole development is changed. For example, at the time of the great Reformation there was a crisis in Europe. Half the continent definitely threw off the ancient tendencies of the Church; the other half continued them, though in a modified direction. It was a remarkable instance of what biologists call reversion to

type: an attempt to remount the course of history, and take a new departure from an earlier point in the history of the Church.

From the historic point of view we have no right to condemn *à priori* such reversions. If a church is in a state of decay and degradation, then reversion to an earlier state is a good thing, even if the lines of development have to be partially broken. In fact, not only did the Protestants in the sixteenth century revert, but also the Catholics, though in a less violent fashion.

It is curious to notice how, in the Protestant appeal to earlier Christianity, the date of the type reverted to has been constantly receding. At first the appeal was to the early Church, then to the Apostles, then to the Founder Himself, the notion being that Christianity came into the world pure and perfect, but was progressively corrupted. It is more in accord with modern ideas of history to think that as Christianity grew it absorbed both good and evil, in some ways improved and in some retrograded. Which was really the golden age is a question which cannot be settled apart from an appeal to some accepted standard of good and evil.

Of course change and progress are by no means the same. Just as individuals may degenerate, as well as progress, so nations and societies also may change, not for the better, but for the worse. Nations, like individuals, may suffer from disease, moral and intellectual paralysis, and decay. Not only may the lower and baser elements in the national life gain for a time the upper hand, but also it not seldom happens that the impulses which move peoples and societies in a new direction are radically bad impulses, and bring with them the seeds of degradation and misery. Why this should be so we know not. It is part of the problem of the existence and power of evil in the world. Sometimes when we trace out the causes of decline, we find them in the indulgence by a people of the baser part of their nature, cruelty, oppression, cowardice, materialism. But sometimes in nations, as in individuals, a dark and evil impulse seems to come from some hidden source, to mislead the people, as a false prophet might mislead them, into ways which lead to destruction.

National progress, then, has to contend against two kinds of opposition : the opposition which springs out of the evil of human nature, and the misleading and corrupting impulses which arise in the world side by side with good impulses, and struggle with the latter for dominion. That on the whole, at least in modern history, progress does, in spite of everything, take place, all must believe who are not given over to pessimism. But in examining short periods of history we by no means always find progress : sometimes a general retrogression ; more often still, progress in some respects counterbalanced by retrogression in other respects.

In the present chapter it is of progress that I propose to treat ; and if our tone seem too hopeful and optimistic it will be easy in succeeding chapters to supply the necessary corrective of doubt and hesitancy.

*The divine ideas* is a phrase which sounds somewhat vague and indefinite : nay, worse, it carries with it some associations of scholastic hair-splitting, and may offend so practical and so definite an age as ours. But the vagueness of the phrase is perhaps a recommendation, and we shall hope before long to reduce that vagueness within the limits of more definite meaning.

By *divine ideas* is here meant those noble and life-giving religious impulses or tendencies which, by degrees, variously, in various ages, become displayed upon the theatre of the world's history, and are worked into the framework of human society. So far as we see them they are always working, always becoming ; they present themselves in a thousand aspects to a million minds ; never can they be wholly grasped or comprehended ; we can no more absorb an idea than we can absorb the light of the sun. Our business is to search them out, to accept them, to believe them, to live by them, and so far as we can to lead others into their light and truth. At best we have the heavenly treasure in earthen vessels.

Perhaps no better plan can be found, with a view to further explaining the nature of the divine ideas, than to try various words by which men have endeavoured to speak of them, and to see in what way each of these words is defective.

They have been spoken of as religious *doctrines*. But a

doctrine belongs to the understanding, not to the heart, to man's speculative, not his practical faculties. It is quite true, as it will be necessary at some length hereafter to show, that those who are inspired and animated by a religious idea are impelled by the demands of the understanding to give that idea a body in the phrases of doctrine, to place it as a proposition, or set of propositions, amid the other furniture of the mind. But it is impossible thus to include a living idea within the four corners of a verbal proposition. At most one aspect of it can be fixed for a time, to the great help of man's intellect ; but the form of doctrine soon decays and the idea demands new and more appropriate embodiment. To suppose that the thoughts of God can be finally arranged into a body of divinity, or the consecutive clauses of a creed, shows a most vain and presumptuous misreading and under-estimating of them. It is to confuse God's work with man's work ; life with thought ; the infinite reality with the limited and closely conditioned phenomenon. Such confusion is, alas, only too common. It vitiates the teaching of one of the noblest as well as ablest of the religious writers of our time, Cardinal Newman, who, in his *Development of Christian Doctrine*, after writing admirably about religious ideas in the first chapter, gradually glides, in the second and third, into a confusion between them and mere doctrinal views and dogmas.

There is less objection to calling our ideas *revelations*. For revelations they are indeed, given to men not at once, but by slow degrees, and with slow working transmuting the tissue of society. But, unfortunately, the word revelation has become, through constant misuse and gradual degradation, in a high degree misleading. Among Evangelicals, it is applied exclusively to the Canonical Scriptures, which may be, and are, full to overflowing of the greatest of the divine ideas yet brought within human sight, but contain them only as the moon contains the light of the sun. A revelation is generally supposed to be some piece of knowledge which a man could not acquire by the use of his own faculties, but which is dropped ready-made into his mind by divine power ; and this way of looking at things is so radically at variance with the facts of the world, both spiritual and physical, that it can only be set aside as



false and misleading. The smallest of its errors is that it falls into the confusion spoken of in the last paragraph between idea and doctrine.

Nearer still to the mark would it be to speak of ideas as *inspirations* or *impulses*. For in thus speaking account would be made of the main truth that it is to the will and the heart rather than to the intelligence that the divine ideas chiefly present themselves. And it may be allowed that so far as individuals are concerned an idea will usually come, not merely *by* an inspiration, but *as* an inspiration, impelling him by its life-giving and life-directing force to "burn what he had adored, and adore what he had burned," to live in future a life which is not his own but another's. Notwithstanding this, the notion of inspiration is too much confined to the individual to be suitable when it is mainly societies of which we are thinking. We do not think of a community or a nation as inspired. And besides, in inspiration we have, so to speak, the pure form without the substance. The ideas come as impulses, but not as vague impulses: rather as quite definite tendencies in certain directions.

The ideas might also be spoken of as *experiences*: the experiences of the higher life which at every point penetrates the lower life, the experiences of the working of a Power, not ourselves, in the inner shrine of consciousness. This word experience is in common use in many Christian circles. And it is perhaps the best term to use in regard to the inspiration of individual heart and conduct. But it is less appropriate when we speak of societies and nations. For seldom, save in times of strong religious revival, does the action of the divine ideas on society appear so clear and definite that it can be well spoken of as experience. Inward experiences, and experiences of individuals, lie at the roots of the progress of societies, but when we regard that progress as it appears in history, it seems to demand the use of words at once less individual and more objective than the word experiences.

Looking at ideas in another light, we might be disposed to call them *principles*. What doctrine is to the understanding and inspiration to the heart, that principles are to the will: rules of action representing the line of contact between in-



spiration and active life. And as doctrines enable us to deal with the ideas in the realm of intelligence, and to put them on terms with the knowledge which comes by experience, so do religious principles enable us to direct our conduct in the course for ever lighted up by the divine light which lighteth every man which cometh into the world. But to use the word principles in the place of the word ideas would be obviously unsuitable; for not only has that word a somewhat hard and unsympathetic sound, but also it has in it far too much of the ego and of personal will. My principles are mine, and their possession is just the thing which justifies my existence as a personal being; but the ideas belong to no man's personality; rather the personal will of all into whom they enter is absorbed by them, and guided apart from self-assertion to the pursuit of higher and nobler purposes. That the ideas are the principles of God's government is true; but we naturally feel that it is inappropriate to talk of the principles of the Divine Father.

It would certainly not be felicitous to speak of the divine ideas as *laws*. For few words are more ambiguous than the word law, and few contain deeper swamps of metaphysical obscurity. By speaking of the laws of God in a sense too anthropomorphic, people have been led to look upon divine law as something arbitrary and conventional. And by speaking of the laws of nature, without attaining to a clear conception of what nature is, men have been involved in the deepest of absurdities and self-contradictions. But the root-idea of law is a rule of life prescribed by a higher authority under penalties. And in this view the ideas are certainly like laws. They are set before us, quite apart from our wish and intention, and it is the worse for us if we do not follow them, and try to embody them in our conduct and in the world about us. They appear to us as guiding stars and warning beacons, and woe to the ship which is steered in disregard of their light. On the other hand, however, the word law is commonly used among us, especially by the votaries of physical science, to signify merely the uniformities in the course of nature, uniformities as to the origin and meaning of which we have no knowledge; and in this sense law and idea have little in common, are in fact naturally opposed one to the other, since the law is the

summing of that which is in the world, and the idea is the essence of that which is not yet in the world, but is in process of becoming in it.

Perhaps the word *forms* would lie under still graver objections, this word being one of purely metaphysical use, and standing for a class of subjective laws or necessities, as when we say that space is a form of perception of the visible and tangible world, or that time is a form of consciousness. But if we take form as the mere antithesis to matter or contents, then we reach a notion not unlike that of the ideas, which are indeed forms in the sense in which the plaster mould taken from a statue is a form, which will compel any substance poured into it to take the shape of the statue from contact with which it has arisen. Thus the ideas too give shape and direction to human life and will and experience, moulding them after the patterns according to which themselves are moulded by the Divine Ruler of the world. They are like the rocks and hills which determine the course which a river shall take in its flow from the mountains to the sea, or that more inward compulsion according to which a tree grows in the shape dictated by history and nature and not in one chosen by its own caprice.

Many of the characters of the ideas would be best summed up in the word *tendencies*. And this is the word by which Matthew Arnold, whose eloquence sometimes makes us overlook his wonderful power of insight, has usually chosen to designate them. The ideas in their practical working are a stream of tendency, bearing us towards happiness and righteousness. As the constant stream of electricity compels the needle to point to the north, so the constant tendency of the ideas is to hold life in relations with goodness and to keep it in equilibrium. The ideas are tendencies as being moving powers within all life and experience, not to be found by any analysis or investigation, but to be observed in their working and results; just as the will and character of a man cannot be found by dissecting him, but will shine out in his life if we watch it.

Some writers of a philosophic turn have chosen to speak of the divine ideas as the *realities* which underlie the mere

appearances or phenomena of the world. And this way of speaking is in itself true enough, though it does not accord with ordinary use of language, or the common everyday way of looking at things. Philosophy is hardly started on the career set before her, when she finds, as did the earliest of the Greek philosophers, that all things are in a flux, in a state of transition, and that they are not so solid as they seem. The surface of the physical universe is very soon seen to be hollow, concealing something which we long to search out, which has seemed to some an underlying material stratum, and has seemed to some to be pure thought. And the more cloud-like and unsubstantial the physical world appears, the more real do those things appear which lie behind it, the powers and tendencies which are ever working through and moulding it. To the man of common sense a fact of physical nature is the very type of hard and unyielding reality: facts, according to the proverb, the most stubborn of things. But no man of ordinary intelligence can set himself to try and find out what a fact really is, without sliding fast into scepticism, which is only to be avoided by taking refuge in some idealist or some materialist scheme of philosophy. And when he has purged away the natural prejudice which attributes reality to phenomena of the world rather than to aught else, he will be willing to allow that ideas and tendencies may have a better claim to reality than what is merely seen and felt. Ideas and tendencies live below and within what is seen and felt at an intenser depth of being. It is not merely that they will exist when the mere outward fact has passed away, but that they already exist in a true and deep way of their own, as to which every philosopher knows something.

There is an argument in Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* to prove the objectivity of the divine ideas, which must here be repeated. "In proportion to the variety of aspects under which (an idea) presents itself to various minds is its force and depth, and the argument for its reality. Ordinarily an idea is not brought home to the intellect as objective except through this variety, like bodily substances, which are not apprehended except under the clothing of their properties and results, and which admit of being walked round,

and surveyed on opposite sides, and in different perspectives, and in contrary lights, in evidence of their reality." This notion is ingenious, and worthy of a careful consideration. But we are after all independent of any such arguments. To prove the objectivity of the subject matter of religion from the individual and speculative point of view is a very difficult matter, requiring a careful metaphysical discussion. But to prove its objectivity from the social point of view is a matter of no difficulty at all. For in that case the appeal lies not to metaphysics but to history. And the testimony of history is simple, unambiguous, final. The ideas have, as a matter of fact, worked themselves into the woof of human history ever since man began to be, or at all events since he began to be a religious creature. They have but to be sought out, disentangled, compared and analysed. They are as undeniably real and objective as Roman Law or the English Constitution.

If we have now partially seen what the divine ideas are not, it should be easier for us, at least in part, to discern what they are. They are the underlying norms according to which God has been from the dawn of history moulding human society, and creating a moral world, with the help of all men who deserve to be called good, and in face of the opposition of all powers of evil, both human and præterhuman. They are the thoughts which, when they pass out of the store-houses of possibility and become visible in men and in societies, are seen to be good. They cause the upward swervings of the line of human progress, that strange irregular line which is always fluctuating, but which in God's good providence has on the whole moved upwards. They are the originals in heaven which become the parents of innumerable imitative types on earth: types faded, imperfect, one-sided, yet having in them after all something divine, so that they kindle our hearts and stimulate our wills whether we choose or not: types finding flesh in a few men and a few women of each generation, whose light shines in all eyes, and whose example passes not away.

As regards human nature, then, the ideas are reflected in the highest points of perfection in successive ages. And excellence being in man a practical thing, the divine ideas are mostly made known to men on their practical side. We see

them working, tending, striving ; here moulding a character into the utmost beauty of moral sweetness, there inspiring a hero to suffer and to die for their sake and the sake of the world ; here again informing and organising a society whose mutual relations are based on an appreciation of an idea, there again stimulating a great enterprise which is destined to raise the whole level of life in a country or a district. We see them giving fervour to the poet, inspiration to the prophet, untiring energy to the reformer, a noble intention to the patriot statesman. We see them breaking the fetters of the slave, raising the condition of the working masses of mankind and the tone of the higher society, improving the position of women, checking the prevalence of vices but too natural to imperfect human nature, and giving every one who cares to live for better things something better to live for.

But though mainly practical, since conduct is the main end of man, the divine ideas are not confined to what is practical. They work also in the regions of feeling and of thought. By them the noblest poems are inspired, and in their light the great plastic arts, architecture, sculpture, painting, find their best meaning and their highest mission. Music is their devoted servant, and stirs the hearts of the noblest to battle on their behalf. They sit enshrined in our cathedrals, and stand revealed in our services of prayer and song. And not less do they visit the thinker also, the man who offers in the service of God not his blood or his life, but his brain and his nerves, which are slowly eaten out by wearing thought. To him they form the corner-stones of intellectual systems ; they give unity to history and meaning to human existence. Their aggressive power moulds the results of experience and the arguments of wisdom, and throws into a new light all that men have done and suffered, and felt, and thought. And the torch thus lit at the fires of thought is passed back again into the world of practical life, so that the good feel that not only goodness calls them, but wisdom also sanctions the call ; until at certain periods of the world's history, thought and feeling and action seem to move like the Graces, hand in hand, to the music of a heavenly inspiration.

It would be a noble task to trace the ideas in their working



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in all the fields of human activity, to observe not only how they make terms with the intellect and so produce doctrine, but how they inspire the various arts, architecture, painting, music, and poetry ; how they crystallise into custom, and how they mould and organise the outward form of society. But obviously all this could not be done in a single book. In the main, therefore, I propose to confine my investigations to the intellectual and doctrinal aspect of the working of ideas.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TEST OF IDEAS

In saying that human progress is caused by divine ideas, and that ideas which lead states and communities to what is better are divine, we would not preach unreasoning optimism. It is quite certain that the medal has a reverse. As in the lives of individuals, so in history, the underlying ideas are not all admirable. In the tendencies of nations, as in the impulses of persons, evil is mixed with good. As a community may rise to what is better, so it may sink to what is worse, and pursue courses which lead to barrenness and disaster. And again, ideas may for a time be a raising power, but only for a time, and become outworn, or unfit for adoption under varied circumstances. Thus we require, as in daily life, so in dealing with history, some test of ideas, whereby we may discern between the evil and the good. We want if possible to discover how they may be divided into three classes: first, those which are good always; second, those which are good but of temporary value only; third, those which are false and misleading.

The first and most obvious test of ideas is suggested by the study of biology, and may be imported from that study into the field of historic observation. It is the well-known test of survival of the fittest, familiar since Darwin to all. As in the field of animal and vegetable life, so in the field of national life there is a continual struggle for existence. I do not mean the mere struggle of nation with nation, but the competition in the field of humanity of idea with idea. Some

ideas are soon crushed out of existence, because the customs and beliefs in which they embody themselves are unfitted to our surroundings. Some ideas, and indeed most of them, have vogue for a while and form the visible life of nations, but after a while lose their power and influence, so that all which arose out of them decays. Some ideas, again, seem to have roots in what is permanent in human nature, and persist from age to age, taking a new and more suitable form when that in which they had first appeared is outworn.

An idea which cannot maintain itself in the world must be regarded as rejected by nature, though at the same time it may be doubtful if in some cases it may not be too good, rather than too bad, for our imperfect nature and surroundings. An idea which is persistent, and constantly reappears in history, is almost certain to be worthy, or at least to contain elements important to mankind. Between the class which nature rejects and that which she stamps with approval is a large variety which must be more closely considered. We must apply first the biological test, that of survival; and then the test of fruits, though neither of these tests can be applied with the same objective rigour as a mechanical or chemical test.

The purely biological test, that of survival, is far more easily used in a negative than in a positive fashion. It is far easier to detect by its aid such ideas as are unfit for our surroundings, than to select such as are entirely justified by success in the world. It is obvious that if an idea brings to an end the society which adopts it, it is condemned. Tribes which live by rapine and aggression are destroyed whenever orderly government reaches their borders. The religion of the Thugs could not survive when India became subject to western civilisation. Polygamy cannot maintain itself in contact with monogamy, and thus if polygamy had been indissolubly united with the ideas of Mormonism, the Mormon community would probably before this have come to an end. The beliefs of the Jews of the first century of our era led by a natural process to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

But, like all tests, that of survival cannot be used in a merely mechanical fashion. It is of societies, not of the

individuals composing them, nor even of corporations within them, that we are speaking. The monastic idea, for example, by prohibiting marriage, naturally brought to an end the institutions founded upon it, if those institutions be regarded as consisting of individuals. It could only continue by perpetually preying on the community and carrying away fresh converts for its own purposes. Yet the monastic idea was singularly lasting, and indeed in our own days seems on many sides to be rather reviving than decaying. The natural and obvious supposition is that though it drained in some respects the forces of the community, yet it in other ways increased those forces, and in some way or other redressed the balance of its account with society. The Buddhist priests in the East and such societies in the West as that of the early Franciscans not only lived, in the fashion of parasites, on the fresh blood of the community, but also, being entirely dependent for food upon mendicancy, drained its material resources. Yet these societies do not thus stand *ipso facto* condemned, unless it be shown that they did not in return for food and shelter give something which tended to the higher life of society. If they did this, they may have furthered the vitality of the community at the cost of individual loss, and so may take a high rank among human institutions.

It is easier to condemn ideas which are destructive of human society than to select for approbation such as necessarily tend to the good of that society. We certainly cannot say that all ethical and religious ideas which have long endured among men are therefore justified. This would be to give up altogether the ideal character of the good, and to fall into the quagmire of indifference. It would be not impartiality but absence of colour and meaning. It would be confusion of what Mr. Alexander<sup>1</sup> calls the formally good with the materially good.

If two antagonistic ideas are alike permanent, it is evident that from the mere biological point of view they are equally justified. And in order to choose between them we shall require a test not merely mechanical, but involving the notions of good and evil. To take a simple instance, it is evident that

<sup>1</sup> *Moral Order and Progress*, p. 312.

the ideas on which Chinese society and institutions are based have been, to judge by the facts of history, at least as permanent and steady as those upon which either the Teutonic or Latin races founded themselves. No one, in trying to convert a Chinaman to the Christian religion, could use in its bare form the historical argument, "Your ideas have not been suited for survival in the world, whereas ours have." It would be necessary to induce him to accept or believe in some other standard than that set up by mere history and nature, before there could be any hope of gaining him over to a perception of the inferiority of the ideas of his race.

And this instance will show the insufficiency, from a historical point of view, of that test which Newman regarded as final in matters of belief, his "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," the infallibility of universal consent. Universal consent may be infallible, but what religious ideas can claim it? The Chinese are supposed to be nearly a third of the human race; and to which of our ideas would they give a general assent? The fact is, that by *orbis terrarum* Newman meant the Christian Church, which is and always has been but a part, never the greater part, of the human race. And in fact he meant something much narrower than the Universal Church, even in the writings of his Anglican days, for he interpreted the phrase "Christian Church" in quite a narrow and conventional way, excluding from it those who did not bear certain arbitrary marks which he deemed essential.

There is just a substratum of truth to this notion of the infallibility of universal consent which is well worth observing. All those who regard history as governed by law, must allow that an idea cannot prevail in the struggle for survival unless it possess some advantages in meeting definite needs and in being suited to human surroundings. That is to say, an idea cannot succeed unless it has merit of a kind. And those who regard history as providentially controlled will be very unwilling to consider an ultimately victorious idea as tending on the whole to evil. Our knowledge of the facts of history is so imperfect, and our perception of the interactions of beliefs and acts so dull, that it may well seem wiser for those who are studying past history to assume that any great change in

society was on the whole good, or led on the whole to good, rather than to praise or condemn it in the light of personal conviction.

Such is the biological tendency which naturally works in the scientific historian. But if it is carried to an excessive length it is fatal. If the historian comes to regard all victorious movements as good, and history as a continuous progress in the right direction, he must, in setting aside all bias, give up his human character.

It is less easy to deal with another class of ideas, which are not permanent, and yet which must be allowed to have been for a time good and valuable to humanity. We here reach another aspect of the great law of illusion, one of the widest reaching and most remarkable of all human phenomena. It is the fact, however we may prefer to explain it, that many of the movements which have done most for the life of the human race have been closely associated with or dependent on beliefs which no one now would regard as true. We have here illusions taking the place of divine inspiration, and working with no less efficacy for the salvation of men.

Ideas of this character subserve a temporary need, and leave society the better for their prevalence. Their existence is a proof how dangerous is the application in these matters of any hard external test. We are driven in the end to consider the nature of good and of evil besides mere duration, though the fact of duration furnishes a first and rough criterion. We can only say, if our study of ideas is made with a view to conduct, that we may regard the impermanence of ideas in the past as a *prima facie* reason against following them in the present.

As an individual every man must judge of fruits in the light of his own feelings and necessities, not unaided by the light which lights every man who comes into the world. But a man is not an individual merely. He is a member of society and a link in a chain stretching from the unmeasured past into the remote future, a moment in the development not of mankind merely, but of a particular race and a definite family. And he comes to all questions of conduct and the ideal with a strong and definite bias, of which he can no more rid himself than he



can of the colour of his eyes, or the form of his limbs. Just as a healthily constituted white man will turn away with disgust from the seductions of a Hottentot Venus, so will each of us in history turn away from certain ideas, and be attracted by others which awake, without the interference of the will, all that is best in our natures.

Even in the case of individual religious beliefs the test of fruits is sound and legitimate, as well as far easier to apply, when we are considering the beliefs of communities and the fruits which they bear in the history and actions of those communities. For in societies we see fruits appearing in a more obvious and visible form; the subjective element is less, and the objective element stronger and more prominent. And if we possess accounts of the history of a society or a movement, extending not over a short time only, but over a series of generations, the innate powers of the ideas which it embodies and on which it is founded must needs come out more and more clearly, the disturbing influence of the personal character of the founders and directors sinking more and more into the background. It has been observed by the advocates of Utilitarian Ethics that the test on which they rely is far easier and safer in its application to countries and to masses of men than to individuals: and this must hold true of all such outward and visible tests.

It may be thought that historical bias bears a painful likeness to mere prejudice, and that we are defending the mere prepossessions which every man is bound to lay aside at the call of reason. We do hold, emphatically and without hesitation, that the man who would be free from all historical bias, and look at all practical questions in a perfectly white light, would be no man at all but a wretched pulseless creature, without heart and without backbone. The European who could weigh in a calm and equal balance the views of the Turks on marriage, or the views of the Chinese as to cleanness, would deserve to be converted to those views. There are many questions which it is unhealthy to discuss, and in which hesitation is not merely weak, but degrading and contemptible. But the word prejudice should be applied only to judgments warped by selfishness, by laziness, or by cowardice. It is Mill's



"because I am I" which is the false element in judgment. We have no right to think that we must be right, merely because we are ourselves. But we have a right to stand by ideas which have led our ancestors for generations to virtue and success; and we have a right to stand by ideas which have worked well in our own lives.

It is a natural conceit in man to suppose that by mere reasoning power he can learn what it is best to feel, and what it is right to do. And it is also a natural conceit to suppose that mere reasoning will lead him to right views in regard to the history of the human race. Every one has a natural prejudice to the effect that he is free from prejudice; that he sees things in a white light; and that others only differ from him because they are unreasonable. We are very fond of looking on ourselves as the embodied spirit of sense and truth. But the real fact is contained in a statement made in a previous chapter, that man's intellect was given him in the main, not that he should reach the heights of abstract knowledge, but that he should be able to see his way in life. We have light enough to walk by; and more would tend rather to flatter our vanity than to help us to be what we are intended to be in the world, useful citizens and upright men. We have enough light from heaven to enable us to discover what are good and what are evil impulses in life for ourselves, but not enough to enable us to discern the whole plan and scheme of the universe.

It is at once evident that history, if read in the light of a formed ethical standard, will furnish a test of the comparative goodness of ideas. The historian will show what ideas have led the societies of which he writes to what he thinks virtue and happiness, and what ideas have dragged them down into vice and misery. If he is dealing with foreign races or with remote ages there will be less of this practical element, his bias will be less strong, his light whiter, and as a consequence he will be less didactic and less interesting. But if he deals with his own country, or with any society in nearly the same stage and condition as his own country, he must needs assume ideals and paint with a purpose. And in proportion as he does so, he will become an ethical teacher, and by showing the history

and consequences of the acceptance of ideas in the past, will also show which are most worthy of acceptance in the present.

It is difficult to express the dignity and value which accrue to history when it is seen that she is a legitimate, and, within certain limits, trustworthy guide in the matter of religious beliefs. The existence of these limits must indeed never be forgotten; and in regard to them we shall have much to say hereafter; but at present we may regard the efficiency rather than the limitation. The study of nature, animate and inanimate, has in our time wonderfully advanced in nobility, and in fact acquired almost a religious character, because discovery has been made in that field of some of the marvellous root-principles which rule in the creation of the world. But the study of history has in consequence somewhat lost ground, and has often been spoken of as if it were the investigation of mere "human lies," as opposed to the divine truth of nature. Yet in proportion to the greater importance to all of us of conduct as compared to mere material surroundings is the greater dignity of history compared to that of chemistry and physics, or even biology. In the last century a poet wrote, "The proper study of mankind is man," and perhaps the next century will return to that view as the truest.

## CHAPTER IX

### IDEA AND MYTH

WE may compare the divine ideas, in their unembodied state, to the souls which were supposed by ancient writers to be waiting in Hades until a body was prepared for them to inhabit.

It is difficult to find a single word which will well express the embodiments of the ideas. They have to find a material tenement, and, in so doing, to lose their spiritual brightness. And, beyond this, any expression which they may find belongs to a particular age and race, and distorts them in a mirror of which the surface is never smooth. So a perfect rendering of them under the forms of time and space cannot be hoped for.

In some schools the term *symbol* is regarded as the best to express the human rendering of the ideas. This word has the advantage of comprehensiveness. It can stand for almost any imperfect rendering of an idea. M. Sabatier has used it very effectively in his philosophy of religion.<sup>1</sup> And there is this element of symbolism, of implying and suggesting more than is actually stated, in myths, in temples and statues, in creeds and doctrines, in every expression of religious experience and impulse. However, I have written these pages without adopting the language of the symbolical philosophy, preferring to be as clear and definite as possible, whereas the language of the symbolists tends somewhat to the indefinite.

The ideas can enter into the thought of the visible world

<sup>1</sup> *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion*, A. Sabatier.

in more ways than one, according to the nature of the peoples and societies with which they come in contact. Among races which are in intellect on the level of children they very commonly find their first embodiment in the form of myths. At a more advanced stage of intellectual growth they take the form of systems of doctrine. And as all peoples are apt in their ways of acting to acquire and to preserve habits, ideas may very commonly be found at the root of custom and ceremony. Among societies which have a tendency towards plastic or pictorial art, they enter into and inform that art; and in societies which have a faculty for organisation they control the processes of organisation, and shape its results.

We have compared the course of history to the growth of a tree, and the ideas to the sap which rises in it. So long as a tree is living its growth is methodical and continuous. A tree does not one year put out a branch, and the next year a new branch to supersede and choke it. It may indeed happen even to a strong and living tree that some branch may be, from external or internal causes, atrophied, and may become stunted or decayed. But this is the exception; while regular progress is the rule. So if we regard history, we see that nations or churches have sometimes started in an unfruitful direction or relapsed to a lower level. But usually their motion has been fairly continuous. And when we can trace a great ethical idea through ages it is in the last degree unlikely that it can be intended to dry up or disappear with the further progress of mankind. New forms and developments it is likely to take, but certainly not to pass away.

The sap of a tree is essential to the life of the tree, but it becomes visible, not as it is in itself, but in various outward forms. It may take the form of wood, or it may appear as leaves, or it may turn into bud and flower and fruit. In the same way, ideas may take many forms; and which of them will have the preference depends no doubt on the circumstances of the surrounding society. We see the result, but the law is too deep to be traced.

Among the ancient Egyptians, religious ideas were specially manifested in the form of ritual and art; among the Greeks, in myth and art and philosophy; among the Jews, in ritual and

poetry and the laws of conduct; among the Romans, in the organisation of society. He who should endeavour to write a history of the various manifestations which they have taken in different countries and at different ages, would have to write a work of colossal size, a work for which the faculties of no one man would suffice. Perhaps by degrees this history will in time get itself written. But it is necessary that we should fence in, for the purposes of this work, a small part of so vast a field. I propose, therefore, to speak not of art nor of custom nor organisation, but only of the intellectual rendering of the divine ideas, and of that but in small part.

The expression of these in intellectual form takes place along two roads, whereof one is especially in use in earlier, the other in later days. There is among all nations a mythopoeic period, when the nascent ideas are naturally embodied in tales told of god and hero. And with the myth go naturally the arts of sculpture and painting, which are so admirably adapted to the representation of tales. When the mythopoeic age passes away, it is succeeded by a doctrinal age, when men try to express the idea not in tales but in propositions and systems of thought. Then the plastic arts give way to those vaguer and more emotional arts which can give better expression to deep thought and lofty aspiration, architecture and music. We must briefly treat first of the mythopoeic, and next of the doctrinal age. It would, however, be going much too far if we made the ages of myth and the ages of doctrine successive and mutually exclusive. Doctrine, in fact, begins in a rudimentary fashion as soon as man begins to reflect on spiritual experience. But in early times doctrine is overlaid with myth and constantly based upon it; whereas in later times it is based rather upon history, upon reasoning, and upon experience.

When we inquire among civilised or semi-civilised races for the reasons of their religious practices or beliefs, the answer usually takes the form of a myth.<sup>1</sup> The myth has two main characteristics. First, that it has for hero or subject some being endowed with human attributes. Whether it be a god

<sup>1</sup> The following paragraphs are from a paper read before the Society of Historical Theology at Oxford in October 1895.

made in the likeness of man, a human being, an animal, or even some stone or tree, for the time it becomes in the story human, of like passions and desires with him who tells the tale. The second great characteristic of the myth is its indefiniteness. It is always in the aorist tense. Often myths begin with the exordium, "Once on a time." Their relation to time is usually of the vaguest. Their independence of space is less marked, since the tale is usually told of some particular place. But then exactly the same tale is told of a number of different places. The myth is also above the rules of logic. It is often not at the trouble to be consistent with itself. And mutually inconsistent tales in regard to the same deity or personality might perfectly well circulate together without collision. The myth is also usually independent of any observed fact or law of nature. The animal talks, the stone walks, man flies, and the gods take any form which it pleases them to assume. Thus the myth is independent of time and of space, and under no subjection to the rules of logic and consistency and the laws of nature.

This being the case, it is clear that there is a bottomless gulf between the myth and what in these days we call history, which aims at narrating what really took place at a definite time and place, and which strictly conforms to the laws of consistency and those of nature. And yet, perhaps, the myth may have its origin in the search for truth; only the notion of truth among those who invent or repeat myths must be very different from that of the educated modern world. But the modern notion of historic truth is very recent, and really confined to very few, and we may expect to find, in the course of its slow evolution, other ideas of truth as different from ours as the lizard is unlike the man.

Myths must have risen out of widely felt human needs. This indeed is almost a truism. And the same human needs which caused their birth, determined also which of them should die out and which should survive. They were repeated from mouth to mouth; they ran their course in a district or a country, and a process of natural selection determined which should survive and which should fade and perish. They were accepted, not because they were true, at least in the historical



sense of the word true, but because they were useful, because they increased the happiness or the efficacy of men. Or they died, because they lost their usefulness, and became mere lumber of the mind. But very often, no doubt, they survived after they had ceased to be beneficial, because they were artificially embalmed or preserved in sacred custom, in ritual, or in poem.

What, then, is the wide human need whence myth arose? It seems to me that the myth is the result of a primitive attempt to give a reason, an explanation, or a justification of some actually existing fact. The adjective which may best be applied to it is ætiological. Ætiological in some sense or other are, as I think, all myths; though the first half of that word must be used in at least as many senses as is *causa* by the schoolmen.

When the wakening intellect of early man begins to apply itself to the facts of its environment, he naturally desires some explanation of them, and just as naturally he begins by explaining that which is without by that which is within. Attributing to the powers of the world, wind and rain, sun and stars, rivers, trees, and animals, feelings and purposes not unlike his own, he learns to regard the nature around him as a result of the love and hatred, the lust and jealousy, the kindness and philanthropy of beings seen or unseen, of ðæmons and men, animals and plants, or the personified powers of nature.

Out of this mental state springs, on one side, by a process which has not yet been measured or explained, the strange system called totemism, and out of totemism the rudiments of religion and of social order. Out of it, on another side, comes the construction of myths, a process which goes on broadening and deepening during many ages, till we find, in countries which have an artistic genius, both poetry and the mimetic arts springing up on a mythologic foundation. Regarding these processes without reverence or imagination, in the light of mere cause and effect, we shall see in them the course of natural evolution. Regarding them with reverence and imagination, in the light of conduct and conscience, we shall rather see in them a progressive revelation given by God to man.

I must endeavour to apply in a more concrete fashion the ætiological method of explanation to myths of various classes. I hold these classes to be mainly two. First, we have physical myths, or the myths of external nature. Second, we have myths which relate to custom, whether social or religious.

I. Of these, physical myths are probably the most attractive class. It is these which have been the subject of the most frequent discussion, and which have given rise to the most brilliant theories. They may again be divided into the two classes of meteorologic and geographic. In every case they seem to take their rise in an observed fact, and to find their end in an explanation of the fact, reasonable according to the notion of the reasonable prevalent at the time. Simple instances of meteorologic myth are the tales which connect one constellation known to the Greeks with Orion the hunter; another with the nymph Callisto, who was turned into the Great Bear; another with Ariadne, whose wreath was seen in the sky. There is a mock myth, made on the model of these at a later time, which connected a set of stars with the hair of the Egyptian Queen, Berenice, shorn in consequence of a vow for her husband's safety. I call this a mock myth, because it has the form of a myth without any real underlying belief. It was the invention of courtiers and poets; and though it is always very hard to say where belief ends and poetry (which is the ghost of belief) begins, yet this myth is certainly poetical and shadowy. The nature of the real myths of the class is easily traced. The constellations I have named had, or were supposed to have, a definite form. For that form there must be some reason; and any reason which was proposed had a fair chance of being accepted so long as it did not make too great demand on credulity: that is, presupposed in the sky ways of action which did not seem reasonable. To those who propounded those myths there seemed nothing unreasonable in transferring a nymph or giant to the sky; while such an account of the constellations as our astronomers give would seem contrary to common sense.

Next, we will take a geographic myth. Earthquakes were in Greece sometimes regarded as the result of a blow of Poseidon's trident. And quite naturally. So great a motion

of the earth must be due to the volition of some powerful being; and Poseidon is the embodied power of the sea, which dashes in huge waves on the shore, rending the rocks and hurling them on to the land. Others, however, thought that earthquakes were more often caused by the turning under the earth of the giants there buried and overwhelmed by the gods in the great primitive conflict between the powers of light and darkness. This was about as good an explanation as the other; and though the two explanations were inconsistent, it was not necessary to choose between them; they could quite well stand side by side. But to suppose that the cause of earthquakes was some mere working of subterranean fires, however much liked by the physicist, would seem to many both presumptuous and atheistic.

II. The second class of myths, those which explain some custom of social or religious life, was in Greece peculiarly abundant. Wherever Pausanias the traveller went in Greece, he found rites of difficult explanation in the possession of the temples; and wherever the cult is peculiar there is some local legend to justify it. Sometimes Pausanias says that the legend is too sacred to be told, by which he occasionally means that it is of so unpleasant a character that it must not be exposed to vulgar misrepresentation. But sometimes he repeats it. For example, at Patræ there was a chest, too sacred to open, but supposed to contain a statue of Dionysus. Such vessels with mysterious contents are known among all peoples. But the Greeks must needs in this case enforce the sacredness by telling a story that Eurypylus, a legendary hero, had once dared to open the chest, and had been struck with insanity; and by another story, quite inconsistent with the first, that its arrival at Patræ had stayed a sanguinary old custom of human sacrifice. At Lycosura, in Arcadia, the worship of the earth-goddess, Demeter or Persephone, had strangely become attached to a barbarous image which combined the body of a woman with the head of a horse. Such forms find readier parallels in Egypt than in Greece; and to explain so strange a representation the people had a myth, telling how Demeter had once, to escape the persecution of Poseidon, taken refuge in the form of a mare. Whether, in this case, the myth

sprang directly out of the form of the image, or whether image and tale alike sprang out of the cultus of a local deity, it is not easy to say.

There has been no better or more complete explanation of a myth on ætiological method than that set forth by Mr. Jevons in his analysis of the Eleusinian Hymn to Demeter.<sup>1</sup> The plot of that hymn I need not repeat: it is familiar to all scholars, and may be found in any work on Greek mythology. Mr. Jevons shows how the grafting of the story of Demeter and Persephone on the cultus of the corn-mother or old woman of Eleusis might have taken place. A point that required explanation "was that whereas Demeter certainly dwelt with the other gods and goddesses in Olympus, the Old Woman of Eleusis equally certainly dwelt, for part of the year, in the house in the head-man of the village of Eleusis, and was actually seen there once a year by the whole body of worshippers. There was, of course, no difficulty in imagining that Demeter did actually descend from Olympus and dwell for a time in Eleusis, and that she appeared in the guise of an old woman." "But Demeter must have had some motive for thus withdrawing herself from Olympus and seeking a home in the abodes of men." "It obviously was because she had some cause of quarrel with them. Equally plain was it that the quarrel had some reference to her daughter the Corn-Maiden, for the time at which Demeter appeared at Eleusis in the disguise of an old woman was the time during which the young corn was below ground: when the green blade at length shot up, the old woman was no longer seen in Eleusis; she returned to Olympus. In other words, Demeter's wrath terminated with her daughter's re-appearance on the shores of light."

All the details of the story of the Homeric Hymn, Demeter's wandering with torches, her refusal to drink wine, her holding of the young Demophon in the fire, her drinking of the sacred draught, may be readily explained from the precedence at the Eleusinian festival, which was in its turn a survival of the primitive customs of agrarian religious festivals. For example, the mystæ wandered about with torches. This was really a survival of a primitive lustration by fire of the

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 377.

cornlands. But that origin was forgotten. And in the place of it the people of Eleusis received (we can scarcely say invented) a myth that it was in such wanderings that Demeter had of old sought her daughter. Therefore the votaries of the goddess must follow the example of their mistress and have a share in her passion. The cultus survived from age to age, but in each succeeding age it gave birth to new explanations, marking the change of religious feeling which had come over the people.

It results naturally from the way in which myth arises directly out of feeling and experience that it does not in any country form a compact and consistent whole. We may readily see this if we examine the mythology most familiar to us, that of Greece. Poets and logographers did much to build into a regular construction the tales told by the priests of the gods. But poets and logographers worked on the myths when they were no longer living and growing, when they were dried wood which could be cut about and fitted together. The further back we penetrate into the history of myths the more vague and fluctuating do they appear. Tales utterly inconsistent one with the other flourished side by side and gained general credit. If we follow the steps of Pausanias the traveller in his journey through Greece, we shall find in every sacred place a series of tales in regard to the indwelling deity which the priests preserved, undisturbed by their inconsistency with tales told of the same deity at neighbouring shrines, or embodied in well known poems.<sup>1</sup> The tales told of Apollo at Delos were originally quite of another cast from those told of the same deity at Delphi; and at Athens a third set of myths prevailed. At the centres of civilisation like Athens and Olympia, where men reflected, the schools of priests felt bound to reduce the chaos to order, and formed schemes or colleges of greater deities with defined functions. But in the scattered shrines the chaos remained till the fall of paganism.

The special variety of these human myths with which I propose to deal is the ethical. Ethical myths are scarce in the legendary lore of Greece: a fact which is in many ways

<sup>1</sup> For further details see Gardner and Jevons, *A Manual of Greek Antiquities*, p. 34.



suggestive. And probably for that reason they have been in comparison little spoken of in the great works which deal with mythology on the anthropological side, works such as those of Messrs. Tylor and Fraser and Andrew Lang. They arise not out of the facts of the natural world, but out of the facts of conduct; and they often give in the form of a tale the reason of some change in morality, the true origin of which lies deep in the nature of human progress.

Ethical myths are on the whole the latest in their origin, often the least barbarous. For such reasons they may be less attractive to the anthropologist. But from the point of view of religious history and development they are by far the most interesting of all, and it is they which now form our special subject of investigation.

Myths, as we have seen, do not give the scientific reason of facts, but they give an explanation of them suitable to the intelligence of a non-intellectual mythopoeic age. We must observe this in case of ethical myths. Let us begin with one from Greece.

A crime to which the Greek conscience was peculiarly sensitive was presumption in the presence of the gods. In the experience of the race such presumption usually met with punishment swift and condign. We have many reflections of this conviction in myth, one of the best known of which tells us how the queenly Niobe, mother of seven noble sons and seven fair daughters, incurred by her boasting and arrogance the wrath of Latona, and how all the beauteous children were shot down by the cruel arrows of the twins of Latona, Apollo and Artemis. It is often supposed that the myth of the destruction of the Niobidæ is in its origin physical, deriving from Asia Minor, and that the children who are slain by the shafts of Apollo are the streams of Mount Sipylus, which run in the spring but are dried up by the heat of summer. Whether this be the case or not matters little to the present purpose. The idea that disrespect to the gods brings nemesis may have formed a new legend or put meaning into an old legend; the essential thing is to observe the working of its creative or assimilating power.

One of the most decided steps which a nation can take in



the upward march of civilisation is taken when it first learns to substitute in such sacrifices as demand the life of man a mere animal for a human victim. In the age of the Antonines Pausanias found that in Greece human sacrifices were not altogether extinct, but that at most of the sites at which they had once existed they had been in some way commuted for an offering of a less repulsive kind. In most cases the substitution was justified by an oracle or by a myth. One of the most familiar of Greek myths records such a commutation. When the Greek fleet was about to sail from Aulis for the siege of Troy, it was held back by contrary winds, and it became known that these winds expressed the hostility of Artemis, who could only be pacified by the offering in sacrifice of Iphigenia, the fair daughter of Agamemnon. With profound sorrow the chief agreed to give up his child; but when at the altar the priest Calchas raised the knife to slay her, the goddess herself intervened, and bearing the girl away put in her place a stag or doe.

This is certainly a myth of ethical progress. Yet like most myths of the class in Greece, it presents to us the gods in anything but an amiable light. Artemis bears away the child to be her slave and priestess in a distant temple, showing mere selfishness, as in the story of the Niobidæ she had shown mere anger and revenge.

To find ethical myths which bear a nobler impress we must turn from the mythology of Greece to that of other countries, where a more severe popular ideal of conduct had reflected upon the accepted deities a nobler and sterner morality.

It is in the mythological tales of the Jews that we may best trace moral basis. Perhaps it is necessary to apologise for thus bluntly speaking of some of the tales of the early heroes of the Jewish race as mythological. For there are many among us who regard them as historical, and indeed as more trustworthy than profane history. This feeling may deserve respect, but it is based on a confusion of ideas, and want of historical training. There may or may not be a historical basis to many of the tales told in *Genesis* of the early patriarchs of Israel. But in fact to the recorders of those tales

their historical truth or falsehood was by no means a matter of the greatest concern. When men are at the mythopoeic stage they very imperfectly appreciate the difference between what is historic fact and what has mere ethical appropriateness. If the distinction were pointed out to them they would not value it. Our modern passion for fact is the result of centuries of training in the methods of physical science, and it would be hard indeed to expect it in remote antiquity, and in people who had no such training. This is indeed recognised by able writers of all parties. Mr. Gore, for example, in *Lux Mundi*, writes, "Are not the earlier narratives" of Jewish history "before the call of Abraham of the nature of a myth, in which we cannot distinguish the historical germ, though we do not at all deny that it exists?"

If we compare then a Greek ethical myth with a Jewish, the moral tone of the latter will be found decidedly superior. I have already cited the myth of Iphigenia as one among many which explain the substitution of animals for human victims in piacular sacrifice. A parallel Jewish myth is that of the offering of Isaac. It is not easy for modern Christians to read the account of it in *Genesis* without importing into that account much of the deeper meaning later introduced into it by Jewish and Christian commentators. But at least the tale records a supreme devotion to a God, recognised as a God of righteousness and as a God of mercy. The dedication of Isaac led, not like the dedication of Iphigenia, to his segregation from the world as a temple-slave, but to his consecration as founder of a race destined to carry on during all future time the torch of righteousness and monotheism. The Phœnician kinsmen of the Jews retained down to quite late times the terrible custom of human sacrifice. Its abolition very early among the Hebrews was a mark of their unique religious consciousness, and a sign of their lofty destiny. And something of this destiny is reflected in the myths in which they embody the facts of their religious life.

Another Jewish ethical myth is to be found in the verse of *Genesis* which records how the Creator of the world rested on the seventh day from the labour of creation. No one in our time would suppose that we have here a statement of his-

toric fact. We have a myth which arose directly out of a human need. That a periodic rest is necessary to man is allowed by all, whether materialists or spiritualists. And that times must be set aside for divine worship is recognised by all religious leaders. The racial consciousness of the Jews, strongly grasping these human needs, found for them a remedy in the Sabbath, and for the Sabbath a justification in the myth of the resting Creator.

The growth and spread of myth may be regarded in various lights. From the point of view of pure naturalism myths may be regarded as a sort of flower of the tree of human progress, which develops through the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest. We may look on the myths of the nations with their indefinite forms and their constant changes as we look at the purposeless successions of device in a kaleidoscope. Or from another point of view, that which believes in the penetration and control of human history by divine elements, we may regard myths, and especially that class of them which is ethical, as a progressive reflection in tale, in the land of imagination and feeling, of the ideas of the Maker and Ruler of the world. In my opinion we should combine both views. That which seen from without with eyes void of imagination seems a merely natural progress, seems when looked at in another light, the light of conduct and of faith, to be a process of quite another kind, full of divine influence, and leading up to purposes already laid up in heaven long before the foundations of the world were laid.

As the myths of which I have spoken are the product of ethical ideas, are the body which they assume in order to become visible, it naturally follows that they become worthless in either of two ways. If the idea gains a better and more suitable body it migrates. If the idea becomes outworn and is no longer needed, the body ceases to have an animating principle. In either case the myth becomes valueless except as a historic relic. It may, however, have become enshrined in some great work of literature and art. Or it may have been incorporated in some book regarded as possessing lasting religious authority. In such cases the rising generations put new meaning of their own into the empty vessel. In such

fashion the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria treated the Homeric tales. And in such fashion ordinary Christians of to-day treat the tales of the Old Testament, attributing to Abraham and Jacob and David Christian feelings and purposes. Of course, this method of proceeding is quite unhistorical and full of anachronism. We shall soon have our children protesting against these adaptations as they protest nowadays against the historic improbabilities of the tales of Jonah and Balaam. Nevertheless, so long as such fanciful treatment of Jewish myth does not offend the taste and intellectual tone of the community, there seems no great harm in it. Harm only arises when the half-educated pedant who has learned enough to see that the fanciful treatment of myths is incorrect, but who has not grasped their true character, endeavours to galvanise their original meaning into a new existence. If myths are read as history, and used to supply an outward and historic sanction to ideas which the progress of society has rendered obsolete, then indeed they become a cause of mischief. Then they no longer resemble works of painting and sculpture, which serve for the adornment of life, but rather mummified corpses galvanised and attempting to pass among the living.

## CHAPTER X

### THE OUTGROWTHS OF MYTH

IF the vague and childish character of the true myth be fully realised, it will be easy to understand how, when the intellectual atmosphere changed, it tended to fade away or to change. Setting aside the moral process of which I have spoken, a disturbing intellectual process was also going on. When intellect was so far developed that men began to study consistency, and when the sense of truth had grown, so that people drew a clearer line between history and fiction, then the weakness of the myth was made clear. The more intelligent of mankind began to ask the question which our children are beginning to propound in regard to fairy stories or even many of the narratives of the Bible: Is it true? And to that question there could be no answer. The myth was neither true nor false, but rather indifferent to fact. So as the sense of historic fact arose, people became dissatisfied with myth. The process was no doubt a very slow one, and for ages it was but a select few who, like Plato, disliked myth. But when the process had once begun it could never stop, but must necessarily go on till the whole house of cards fell to pieces.

Few things, however, either in nature or in human history, pass away without leaving results. And so myths as they faded left in the world abundant traces, the nature of which we have briefly to consider.

An essential character of the myth is, as we have seen, its complete independence of time. A main cause of its

decay is the growth of more rigid notions of history, of fact as related to time and to place. It seems therefore quite natural that the continuations of myth should by being brought into more rigid relations towards time, be divided into three classes, those of the past, the present, and the future. Let us consider each of these in turn.

1. *The Past*.—The growing sense of history and historic fact must in the course of its formation everywhere have found it necessary to deal with the surrounding masses of myth. The mythopoeic tendency was far too deeply seated to be easily expelled. What seemed at first possible was to introduce some order among myths, to reconcile their contradictions, to eliminate some and retain others, and to bring the result into relations with the world and the facts of history. Thus the first result was not so much an extraction of history out of myth as a foisting of myth into history.

In the case of Greece we can clearly discern this process. On one side came in the tendency to construct out of mythology an ordered past for the Greek people. Throughout Greek history such exploits as the travels of Hercules and the ten years' siege of Troy by the army of Agamemnon were commonly regarded as events of history; and in the politics of the Greek cities they weighed as such. When Alexander undertook his great expedition against Asia, he regarded himself as the continuer of the work of Achilles. And when he reached the Far East his progress was materially aided by the belief which prevailed among the Greeks and Macedonians that Dionysus had in ancient days penetrated to the same countries, and won victories over the same races. In the time which followed, the same tendency to read myth into history prevailed more and more. Strabo observes that it is dishonouring to the genius of Homer to suppose that he narrates mere fiction; to the great geographer the wanderings of Theseus and Odysseus are sober realities. Polybius tells us that Æolus the Homeric lord of the winds, was a man well skilled in navigation and a weather prophet; and he assigns to the Cyclopes and the Læstrygones a historic seat in Sicily. This fashion of treating myth may be found in the Greek historians, in Philistus and Timæus, Ephorus and Xenophon, though it



is more prominent in later writers, such as Strabo, Diodorus, and Pausanias.

The Egyptians had learned to regard their gods as the earliest known rulers of the land, before the dynasties began. It may be from the Egyptians that Euemerus borrowed his system of treatment of the Greek mythologic tales. Euemerus was a traveller who lived about the year B.C. 300, and who professed to have discovered in his distant voyages documentary proofs, in inscriptions, that the deities whom the Greeks worshipped were really pre-historic rulers and conquerors whom popular fame had, after their death, raised to the divine rank. This extraordinary story, whether put forward in good faith or not, had a wide acceptance and influence in antiquity, affecting the views of almost all subsequent writers. It was, in fact, an attempt to explain the origin of the Pantheon from the working of laws of human nature with which the ancients were familiar, since with them the raising of a person to divine rank was quite a familiar phenomenon, as it is to this day in India and China. And thus it was acceptable to all who did not believe in the present existence of the gods. But here scepticism vindicated itself at sad cost to history.

But more important to our present purpose than this dilution of history by myth is the retention in the writing of history of the tendencies of the mythopœic age. It is clear that the motive which first caused the writing of history must be a motive which has influence at a comparatively low stage of civilisation. It is quite certain then that it was not an abstract love of truth, or the desire of enlarging knowledge. Even among ourselves such a motive as this is not strong, save with a few specially trained persons. The further we go back in history the less powerful do we find it. We must find for the origin of history motives of a less abstract and exalted kind. Often it would take its beginning in the desire to exalt some hero, or the origin of a noble house, and to magnify the deeds of ancestors. Sometimes the motive would be patriotic or priestly. But of the nobler history the motive was ethical or religious. The author wished to set forth his strong conviction of the divine justice which linked together

crime and punishment or to explain the dealings of the higher powers in the affairs of men. In fact the early writing of history would often start from the same motives and purposes which give rise to ethical myth; but the indefinite tense of the myth has to give way to the preterite tense of history, and the necessity of not clashing with well-known historic events must never be wholly lost sight of.

In the proem to *Paradise Lost*, Milton, with lofty directness, tells us that the purpose of his poem was "to justify the ways of God to man." If we turn to the introductory chapters of the early Greek historians we shall not find any so direct statement of ethical purpose; but that purpose is nevertheless present. Herodotus tells us that he wrote in order to prevent the great and wonderful deeds of Greeks and Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory. But the most striking feature of his work is his strong belief in the ever-present action of a divine Nemesis, of the power of which his whole history is an illustration, almost as much as is the *Seven against Thebes* of Æschylus. The most recent of English editors of Herodotus<sup>1</sup> has selected two tendencies as notably dominant in his author's mind: first, the tendency to revise the data of the memories and traditions of earlier events in the light of more recent history; and, second, the tendency to impart a moral or quasi-religious meaning to stories of the past. "No critical student," he writes, "can cite any story or even any statement from these books, as historic or authoritative, without having satisfied himself whether, and to what extent, the passage betrays the influence of this subtle pragmatism." In the *Cyropædæia* of Xenophon we have a work which professes to be historical, but is little more than a romance, so completely is it dominated by the wish to teach moral lessons. No doubt when compared with the surrounding nations, and especially with Orientals, the Greeks are eminently distinguished by love of scientific fact and historic accuracy. It is only when we try them by a modern standard that we realise how entirely idea dominated mere fact in all their art and literature. Of course the motive of the history was not always highly ethical, just as myths were not always ethical; but history was nearly

<sup>1</sup> Macan, *Herodotus*, Books IV.-VI., Introd. p. lxxv.

always strongly *motivé* or didactic, inspired and penetrated by some idea which shines out clearly alike in narrative and in recorded speech.

I do not, of course, mean to say that an ancient historian would usually invent a narrative to suit his purpose. Things take a far less simple course. Just like the myth, the historic narrative arises among ordinary people, and is modified by their subjective feelings. In fact various versions of history arise, embodying different feelings, and the historian selects among them those tales which he regards as most probable: that is, which seem to him most in accord with the ordinary course of the world. If he thinks that vice usually meets condign punishment, he will be more ready to accept a version of history which records such punishment than one which makes crime pass unpunished, and so forth. It is not the conscious intention of men which moulds history, but ideas working beneath consciousness in the minds of historians.

We should naturally expect that the ethical inspiration of history would be more prominent among the Jews than among the Greeks; and this is certainly the case. In the early records of the Hebrews, myth passes into history by imperceptible gradations, and it is impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins. The mythical histories of Lot, of Isaac, and of Jacob are told in so serious and realistic fashion that with untrained readers they pass as history. And they may well contain a proportion of history. It is only when we can trace in them some of the well-known features of the myth that we can definitely call them unhistorical. For example, the story that Isaac concealed his relationship to his wife, Rebekah, for fear of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, is a duplicate of the story how Abraham gave out in Egypt that Sarah was his sister and not his wife. This facility of transfer of a tale from one person to another is a mark of the myth. And when we read in the life of Jacob of the origin of the sacred stone at Bethel, or in the life of Lot of the destruction of Sodom, we can scarcely fail to recognise ætiologic myths. Certain physical phenomena called for explanation, and naturally found one in events of the lives of the early Jewish heroes.

When, on the other hand, we reach narratives which certainly have some historical foundation, such as the books of the Kings, the strong ethical tendency which is so marked a feature of the Jewish myth is still so prominent as to rouse the strongest suspicions of the accuracy of the chronicles. The idea that the temporal prosperity of Israel depends directly on the satisfactory character of the relation of the kings to the God of Israel completely dominates the whole history; and he can know but little of psychology or of human nature who supposes that, in the presence of such a bias, the mere love of truth and accuracy, that feeblest of impulses, would prevail. This judgment on grounds of probability is confirmed by the analysis of the documents themselves; but here we evidently have a matter much too great to be taken up in the present connection.

(2) *The Future*.—Another of the outgrowths of myth is prophecy. Instead of forming the history of the past, ethical ideas may mould that of the future. Perhaps this classification of prophecy may savour of paradox, but it is easily to be defended. In mythopœic times ethical feeling and experience naturally and inevitably finds expression in myth. Later on, in times of prosperity and energy, it reads itself into history. But in times of external oppression and national failure it creates a future more adapted to the ideal reign of truth and virtue than the existing present.

In order to understand prophecy, just as in order to understand the older notions of history, we must begin by emancipating ourselves from those tendencies and prepossessions of mind which have been induced in us by the progress of physical science. When we talk of prophecy we regard the future as rigidly objective. Astronomy is the most prophetic of our sciences, seeing that it can foretell to the minute the date of a future eclipse of the sun or an occultation of a planet. In past days prophecy was far more vaguely conceived, nor was the distinction between the future and the ideal so clearly marked. The future was regarded as potentially and ideally contained in the present. And this, after all, is the truth. There are certain animals which are prescient in regard to changes of the weather. They judge not by any miraculous

communication as to changes to come, but by some feeling of the present, some experience stored up in their organism which bids them connect certain features of the present with a future of a particular character. So when men are in a more instinctive, and less vividly conscious and reasonable state, they draw conclusions from existing ethical facts as to the ethical history of the future. According to Novalis character is destiny. Yet of course all prophecy is, in the nature of the case, very precarious. A thousand unforeseen circumstances may intervene between felt antecedent and foreseen consequence. All that can be felt is the condition of forces at the time, and the most perfect perception of that condition does not necessarily include a perception of causes which may thwart or change the action of those forces. The rain-foretelling animal knows the conditions under which it usually rains, but it does not follow that under these conditions it must necessarily rain, at all events at some given spot. So the seer who has highly developed spiritual instincts will feel the spiritual undercurrent of the world, but he may be mistaken in his suppositions as to when and where the undercurrent will rise to the surface.

Prophecy was in a marked degree an endowment given to Israel. The form which it took, especially during the Maccabæan age, was a vision or anticipation of the coming of a Messiah, the rising from the grave of faithful Hebrews, and the reign upon earth of a renewed and righteous Jewish race. But after all the noblest and sublimest of the Jewish prophecies were those which could not be falsified, because they did not assert the time or the place of their fulfilment. These merely stated great spiritual laws and tendencies which lay at the foundation of human life, and so must govern its course upon earth, must again and again be manifested in history. Such are the sublime statements of the later Isaiah, and of some of the authors of Psalms. Rooted not in mere Jewish beliefs, but in the profoundest facts of common humanity, the prophecy of the suffering servant of Jehovah is quite as true for Christians to-day as it was for Jews when it was first uttered.

(3) *The Present*.—Besides embodiment in history, past or future, ethical ideas may form for themselves a shrine beyond



the limits of the world of space. And in two ways. Either they may produce parables, tales never meant to pass as true from the point of view of history, but only to embody ideal or ethical truth; or they may inspire assertions as to the world which lies beyond sense and experience, in regard to which the word truth can be used only in a changed sense.

The parable is of all the offsprings of myth that which most nearly resembles its parent. The likenesses between the two are many; they only differ in that parable is more self-conscious; it does not wish to be regarded as history, and it has an actual inventor, instead of springing from the general consciousness. Thus instead of the softening of tendency and the gradual subordination to evidence which we find in the earliest history, we have the aetiological and ethical motive persisting in full or even increased force, while the relation to fact and to time is frankly given up. As fruit exists, from the point of view of morphology, merely in order to protect some kernel or seed within it, and give it a better chance of germination, so the parable is merely an attractive vehicle in which a fact of ethics or a counsel of wisdom may be concealed, and handed on from teacher to learner and from age to age. The tale may be openly in disaccord with known facts, like the beast tales of Æsop or the fairy tales of our childhood; or it may take the form of a novel or romance, which may or may not be true to fact, but must embody some ethical content.

Often it is by no means easy to draw the line between myth and parable. The well-known story of the choice of Hercules between Virtue and Vice, who appear to him in female form, is, on the face of it, a piece of Greek mythology; yet we know that it was only a moral tale invented by Prodicus of Ceos. The myths of Plato are apparently built on the foundation of stories current among the Orphists or other religious societies, but adapted to Platonic doctrine. It is curious that Plato in several passages insists on their truth; he says in the *Gorgias*<sup>1</sup> that his tale is not a *μῦθος* but a *λόγος* or true account. On the other hand, when Socrates

<sup>1</sup> *Gorgias*, 523 A., cf. *Timæus*, 20 D., 21 A., 26 C. Westcott, *Religious Thought in the West*, p. 3.



proposes, in the *Republic*, to teach the youth of his imaginary state that the different classes of men in it were originally made by the gods of various metals, gold, silver, iron, and copper, and that their nature thus bore a heaven-bestowed imprint, it is not easy to say whether he is inventing a myth or merely establishing a moral tale.

In the writings of the Old Testament the parable is by no means unknown. Nathan admonishes and convicts David by the parable of the ewe lamb. And some of the prophets are never tired of reproving the faithlessness of Israel to its divine mission by citing parables of the doings of a faithless wife. The whole book of Job, and perhaps that of Ruth, is to be regarded rather as parable than as myth. But it was after the time of writing of the Hebrew Scriptures that the parable became an ordinary vehicle of ethical and religious instruction. And thus this form of sub-myth is far more prominent in the New Testament than in the Old; and it is commonest of all in the Synoptic Gospels.

No one, of course, would make the use of the parable by the Founder of Christianity the occasion of an accusation of untruthfulness,<sup>1</sup> and yet in some cases the natural reverence felt for all his words has tended to turn mere parable into statement of fact. For example, in the parable of Dives and Lazarus the curious use of a definite proper name has caused commentators to suppose that we have in it rather a revelation of the future life than a mere moral tale, and it has become a capital piece of evidence as to the state of the departed. Parable has been read as myth, and myth by a natural process has become history.

When, however, the idea takes form neither in prophecy of the future, nor in parable, but in statements as to the ideal world which underlies the world of mere sense, then it produces doctrine. This view of doctrine may perhaps seem strange. Certainly it is not that ordinarily current. Most people think

<sup>1</sup> No one, that is, whose mind has been trained. Very instructive is an experience of Mrs. Jamieson (*History of our Lord*, i. 375; quoted in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*), "I remember that when I once tried to explain to a good old woman the proper meaning of the word parable, and that the story of the Prodigal Son was not a fact, she was scandalised; she was quite sure that Jesus would never have told anything to His disciples that was not true."

of doctrine as a statement of fact, forgetting that outside the world of experience there can be no such thing as fact. But the view I now state is that which, in earlier chapters of this work, I have tried to establish. And it is not really so distant as it may at first seem from ordinary ways of thinking. The most orthodox would be satisfied with the assertion that doctrine is spiritual truth revealed to man by the Higher Power. And to this assertion I have no objection, so long as the words of it are not understood or misunderstood in a conventional way. It is a statement of truth, but of truth not absolute but relative, truth of which man and not nature is the centre. It is revealed, but by no external and authoritative revelation, by that rather which is from within.

At present I must not enter further into the origin or the development of doctrine. The third book of the present work is devoted to that subject. To those chapters I must refer the reader. Meantime, we must consider, in the light of the principles thus far set forth, the early documents of Christianity, and the earliest history of Christian teaching, in the age before Christian doctrine properly so called came into being.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHRISTIAN CREED

IT is now time to pass from our general sketch of the nature of religious ideas and of the forms in which they are expressed to a special investigation of Christianity, and in particular of the Christian Creed. The attempt is a bold one, nor can I hope to escape the opposition and the anger which have always greeted any attempt to apply to the Christian Creed the principles which are applied freely to other forms of faith. The methods of comparative religion, it is commonly felt rather than thought, are very well when used to classify and elucidate other forms of belief, but they should not be loosed on Christianity. The feeling is most natural. What lover will admit that his mistress is one of a class? The more he is in love, the less he will allow that the rules which apply to other women have anything to do with her. But the lover in time may become a husband; and then, though his love may not fade away, it will change its nature and he will learn to know as well as to worship. Those to whom criticism of Christian history and faith are repugnant have only to lay the present book aside.

The Christian creeds are certainly in a historical aspect profoundly original. They contain, it is true, some statements which belong to all ethical religion, such as the existence of a Deity, and the forgiveness of sins. But even these statements take quite a new form in the Christian Church. Other statements of the creeds are purely Christian.

The fact is that the life of Jesus was the occasion and the

cause of an enormous development of the spiritual faculties and perceptions of men. He found us children in all that regards the hidden life, and he left us men. The writings of his immediate followers show a fulness and ripeness of spiritual feeling and knowledge, which makes the best of previous religious literature, even the writings of Isaiah and Plato, seem superficial and imperfect. From that time onwards men in Christian countries seem to have gained new faculties of spiritual observation, and to those faculties there has lain open a new world of experience of the higher life.

But this mass of new observation, this flood of new feeling, had to take concrete shape in the world. Earthen vessels had to be made to contain the fulness of the new life. And of course this process went on in no arbitrary fashion, but in the natural way which belonged to man. At an earlier period, attempts might have been made to give it a body of myth. But the reception of true myths on a great scale was now impossible. So the newly revealed facts of the spiritual life, and the new ways of regarding the world, took form in some of the fashions of which I have briefly spoken as the outgrowths or successors of myth. These we must briefly consider in order. Indeed, the remainder of this book will mainly consist of a consolidation of the position which we have now reached.

Before we speak of the articles of the Christian Creed, we must consider the word with which that Creed begins, the word *credo*. What is the real nature of religious, and in particular of Christian, belief?

Historically the Creed seems to have arisen out of the baptismal confession. Those who came to the baptism of John seem to have merely confessed their sins and promised amendment. But when baptism became the portal of the Christian society, the custom naturally arose that the convert should state what it was that he regarded himself as pledged to. As we shall see in the chapter which deals with baptism, the earliest converts were merely baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. The last verses of Matthew record a more elaborate profession of faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in that baptism which succeeded the simple baptism into Christ

of which Paul speaks, and from this germ the Creed developed. It is quite natural, since psychology was at the time imperfectly understood, and moreover the early Christians were usually uneducated men, that some of the propositions which passed into the Creed were not such as could properly, according to the essential ideas of Christianity, be matters of faith.

If, in preceding pages, I have rightly analysed religious faith, it consists in a resolute and practical acceptance of the divine ideas, and an attempt to carry them out in the world. Christian faith, in the same way, consists in a resolute and practical acceptance of those of the divine ideas which were specially revealed in the person and in the teaching of the Founder of Christianity. Ultimately and in essence it is far more nearly related to the will than to reason and understanding. It certainly cannot be permanently enclosed in any form of words. Yet since it is a necessity of human nature that any idea when received by the will should find an outward body in words, it must produce an intellectual expression. This expression must comprise propositions as to the data of experience. Faith takes experience in a certain light; and unless it does so, is banished to the realm of subjective feeling and of the unknowable. It reads the facts of the world about us in a particular way. It supports certain views as to the conscious life of men and their relation to divine power and impulse. And since Christianity is a historical religion, Christian faith must needs look at least on certain parts of history in a glow provided from within.

In none of these fields, the outer world, the inner world, history, can faith lead directly to any objective or any infallible knowledge. Knowledge is reached by the use of our powers of observation and of reasoning, on the basis of observation. These powers being alike in all men, any formative idea which comes into irreconcilable hostility with them must wither and decay. This is, however, comparatively a rare case. The ordinary conflict is between knowledge on the one hand, and an imperfect or erroneous expression of an idea in some of the fields of observation.

By the very constitution of human nature, it is impossible even for the most skilled observer perfectly to discriminate

between the idea and its intellectual expression. If we were perfectly logical, we should say, "I accept the idea, and I think the idea may be best embodied in these words." But things being as they are, the warmth of loyal will and of moral passion attaches to the statements of the Creed as well as to the inner faith. And thus he who repeats the Credo of Christianity feels as he speaks that these statements are bound up with his higher life, are the body without which his ultimate beliefs could not live. These remarks are equally valid whether we are thinking of the creed of an individual or of a society. Of course an individual may so sink his own point of view in that of a society, that he becomes incapable of holding any creed apart from it. In that case the doctrine hardens into dogma which is accepted on authority.

The notion that from the first the Christian Church had one formulated creed which she imposed on all converts is quite contrary to the facts of history. Those who were baptized into the Church did no doubt repeat some formula of belief. But this formula varied from age to age and from district to district. Forms of creed arose, flourished, and decayed accordingly as they met or failed to meet the requirements of the spreading society. Even that church which among all churches exercised most authority, the Church of Rome, though she guarded for herself carefully in the third and following centuries a creed supposed to have arisen among the Apostles themselves, yet allowed in the churches of Italy the use of formulæ which introduced considerable variations on it.

The history of the early creeds of Christendom has been sketched in clear outline by one of the most learned and scientific of theologians, Professor Harnack, in a pamphlet published in 1892. He shows that the Creed which we call the Apostles' Creed arose in Southern Gaul in the fifth century, and was adopted under Frankish influence by the Church of Rome in the place of other formulæ. As early as the third century, however, a Creed closely resembling it had been adopted in Rome, and attributed to the Twelve Apostles. Harnack gives the text of this ancient and venerable Church document as follows:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Das Apost. Glaubensbekenntniss*, ed. 25, p. 7. Translated by Mrs. Ward, in the *Nineteenth Century*, July 1893.



"I believe in God the Father, Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, crucified and buried under Pontius Pilate, who rose on the third day from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Church, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the flesh." Other Churches had creeds of their own, usually adding fresh clauses, but seldom making omissions. The so-called Apostles' Creed, for example, adds the Descent into Hades and belief in the Life Everlasting. The Nicene Creed, in use at Rome from the sixth to the eighth century, was adopted mainly in opposition to the Arians, at that time very powerful in the west.

But the period with which we are in this book concerned, the century which followed A.D. 25, was a time before the rise of any creed. Doctrine was in course of formation in the hands of great thinkers such as St. Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, but it was in a more or less fluid state. The necessity for forming it into a systematic whole had not yet arisen. Baptismal formulæ were arising, but no generally accepted confession. Hence, though in this chapter we speak of the Christian Creed, it is of its constituent parts that we shall treat in subsequent pages rather than of the Creed as a whole. If we roughly follow the order of the clauses of the earliest Roman Creed, it is only for reasons of convenience.

The first, and in many ways the most important, of the bodies in which the ideas of early Christianity manifested themselves was in the construction of an ideal life of the Founder. Such a life had, of course, a basis in fact. For the existence of the historical Jesus we have the authority of Tacitus, and we shall see hereafter that great part of the teaching and some of the doings recorded in our Gospels may be accepted by the most sceptical of inquirers as historical. But over and around this historical framework, the early disciples constructed a palace of history, not real but ideal, not related to fact or record but to supposed necessity. "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer."

The first stage in producing an ideal life of the Founder consisted in working into that life fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies, or prophecies regarded as Messianic, in the Old Testament.

Very soon a second stage was reached, at which it became the great concern of the disciples to provide for their Master a fitting entry into the world and an appropriate departure from it. While yet the doctrines of the incarnation and the exaltation were in a very early stage, there was a tendency to make the great biography begin with a miraculous birth or baptism and end with a physical resurrection. It is not easy to decide with certainty whether as a matter of actual chronology the accounts which we now possess in the Gospels of the baptism and the ascension of the Master, and the prophecies of his second coming, are earlier than the Christologic doctrine of St. Paul. But at least they are logically earlier, they belong to a more primitive side of human nature, and lie nearer to the Jewish incunabula of the faith.

The story of the miraculous birth would seem to be a reflection in history of the idea of the exalted nature of the Founder. The story of the resurrection in the flesh and the ascension is a reflection in history of the sense of his spiritual presence among the disciples. The first of these ideas gave rise at a later stage to all the theories of the Church as to the person of Jesus Christ. The second idea or experience gave rise to all the theories of the Church as to the relation of the Founder to his followers on earth.

A very early embodiment of the ideas was that which appeared as prophecy. A Christian ideal of the future had to take the place of the current Jewish Apocalypses. Jesus Christ was to come as judge of quick and dead.

And more and more, as the outlines of the life of the Founder were fixed by published Gospels, and his second coming was thrown into the more distant future, a scheme of doctrine grew and spread. Not the past only and the future, but the present also, the spiritual world which lies about us and within us, was reconsidered in the light of the Christian revelation.

All of this construction was destined to last many ages.

Much of it, especially a great part of the doctrine properly so called, which is independent of place and time, was probably destined to last as long as man continues to dwell upon the earth. But wherever the body which contained the idea was made of earthly elements, it contained in it the seeds of decay.

In order fully to understand any of the articles of the Creed, we should have to consider it in a variety of ways, investigating

- (1) Its connection with the early documents of Christianity.
- (2) Its pre-Christian history, alike in Jewish and in Greek and in Oriental religion ;
- (3) Its baptism into Christ ;
- (4) Its relation to Christian experience ;
- (5) Its relation to theologic construction.

It is, however, clear that thus to treat of the great doctrines of Christianity completely would be to write a history of the religion from its origin to the present day. It is necessary to define what part of all this vast field I propose briefly to survey. I intend to attempt to answer, at least in outline, the first three of the questions above set forth in regard to the main doctrines of the early Christian Church. So far, we have purely historical questions. Question 4, which involves alike history and psychology, I can attempt but in a very imperfect and fragmentary fashion. It is possible here to sketch the psychology of belief, and the manner in which doctrine is accepted and held, but to exhibit the roots of doctrine in Christian experience is beyond my scope. On question 5 I shall scarcely touch. If my views are justified, it is as embodiments of experience, and not as parts of an intellectual system that doctrines are to be valued.

These limitations of our field make it possible to set comparatively narrow limits to the period to be historically investigated. Our concern is only with the time between the origin of Christianity and the middle of the second century. When we pass the middle of the second century, we approach the time when early Christianity, the teaching of the Apostles, gives way to something of a different char-

acter. The order of Bishops is established, giving the Church a hard and clear outline. The Canon of New Testament Scriptures is formed, and becomes a standard of appeal in all controversies. Theological systems arise. On one side, Irenæus and Tertullian develop the idea of a visible church as the channel of a grace which no longer comes freely to inspired prophets and teachers. On the other side, Clement and Origen develop at Alexandria on a Platonic basis logical and philosophic schemes of Christian doctrine. Thus arose the Church and the theology of the Middle Ages.

The ossification which the Church underwent at the end of the second century was doubtless necessary to protect it from destruction at the time, but it renders that Church less fit to be a source of life and growth to those who live under modern conditions. The age of inspiration, the time of abounding life was over, and though no doubt there have been from time to time great revivals of inspiration in the Church, yet the conditions which surrounded them were so unlike ours, that those who speak of religion in broad fashion find it more profitable to look elsewhere.

To the professed theologian and the historian every age of the Church is full of instruction. But those who have to make a selection, and who are searching rather for what is important to modern faith than for complete knowledge, may be pardoned if they hark back to the great, the classical age of Christianity, as philosophers go back from Descartes to Aristotle, and as students of art go back from the Renaissance to Pheidias and Praxiteles. Thus it is the origins of Christianity which chiefly claim our attention.

## CHAPTER XII

### EARLY CHRISTIAN HISTORY

WE have traced in outline the origin of ethical religious history, and have seen that it owes but little in its birth to the desire to learn fact, but a great deal to the desire so to set forth the facts of the past as to give an embodiment of truths of another kind, those of feeling and experience. Testimony as to actual fact was to those who wrote religious history only what clay is to the potter and marble to the statuary, a necessary material, the properties of which must be respected if the work made is to be durable, yet which is in itself without form and void, until an idea is introduced into it by a living spirit.

In the course of the last century, a conception of history quite different from that which had before prevailed has been gradually making its way. This conception marks a great intellectual progress, and we cannot doubt that it has its origin in a divine impulse. The qualities of impartiality and justice, respect for any proven fact, and the earnest desire to trace the true relations and successions of events have become more and more conspicuous in the writing of history. The historian has laid aside the advocate and assumed the judge. He tries to set aside as far as he can all his own prepossessions and idiosyncrasies, and to regard in the whitest of lights the subject of his study.

This scientific and critical frame of mind has filtered through into the study of history from the study of the physical world. By long experience those who have worked

at such sciences as chemistry and biology have learned that knowledge is to be gained not by an eager investigation of nature from a personal point of view, but by the subordination of impulse, by the exercise of a patience almost infinite, and a self-effacement almost complete. Generation after generation of scientific workers has cultivated the white light, the exclusion of all the idols of the cave, the market-place, and the church. Generation after generation has raised to a higher and higher moral level the pursuit of naked truth for its own sake, until that pursuit has become, to whole classes of men, the highest form of religion. And this new faith of the worship of the actual has passed from physics and biology into historical studies; it has changed the character of art by demanding closer conformity to nature; it has gradually permeated all our thoughts and ways until, especially in England, the word *false*, even if used in the sense which only implies want of precise correspondence with fact, at once brands any statement beyond redemption, and makes any view or theory stand condemned and hopeless.

There are two sides to history which must be clearly distinguished, if we would avoid utter confusion. We must separate historic criticism from the historic construction which it precedes, and for which it lays a foundation.

First then of historic criticism. This is a destructive force, and a force of immense power. It is liable to become historic scepticism, and if exercised unduly may reduce the fabric of history, at all events of ancient history, to a heap of ruins. For the fabric of history is not adapted to sustain the assault of methods which are reasonable when applied to things physical and visible. We cannot cross-question historic characters as we would question witnesses in a law court. Thus a direct attack on any supposed historic fact, if pressed home, can seldom be met.

I should be one of the last to deny the use of a critical examination of history. It should be our object if possible to ascertain the actual objective facts which happened in the world from the first, as they would have appeared to a committee of experts specially appointed at the time to investigate them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See my *New Chapters in Greek History*, chap. i.



Much of the life of the present writer has been spent in an endeavour to revise, to illustrate or to correct, the statements handed down to us by writers as to the events of ancient history by confronting them with the most objective evidence we possess, the evidence of extant remains, inscriptions, coins, and the like. The further such process of verification can be carried the better. The more closely our notions of the words and actions which have made up the past of mankind correspond to the objective realities, in so much better position we shall be for really understanding human nature and human progress.

It is, however, quite obvious that even in regard to outward and visible events we shall comparatively seldom be able to arrive at perfect certainty. Take an event of the present century witnessed by thousands, of whom a few were lately alive, the battle of Waterloo. Of that event there are a multitude of quite inconsistent accounts in existence, between which it is difficult or impossible to make choice.<sup>1</sup> How then can we hope to reach objective truth in regard to events further from us? In the majority of cases we can only be sure of general facts, but not of details. We can only accept the version which is offered on the best authority or most nearly conforms to ascertained circumstance; and even that we can only accept with a verbal reservation to the effect that if any fresh evidence makes its appearance we must reconsider the verdict.

Further still from objectivity is that which in history was never visible or audible. We can be sure that Charles I. was beheaded on a certain day in 1649, though we cannot form a final opinion as to many of the actual details of the execution. But when we proceed from this fact to such matters as Charles's relations to the Parliament, the justice or the expediency of his execution, and the like, we involve ourselves in deeper and deeper shades of doubt. And if this is the case in regard to modern history, still more is it true in regard to that which is ancient, the documents of which reach us as wreckage after a destructive storm.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Archibald Forbes has shown the same divergence of testimony to hang about a still more recent event, the battle of Sedan. See *Nineteenth Century*, March 1892.

Thus too direct attempts at objective criticism lead, at all events in the case of ancient history, to its destruction and to chaos beyond. It is like melting down a statue of gold or silver for the sake of the material of which it is made.

The defects of this objective analysis of ancient history may be easily shown. Such history we derive direct in most cases from ancient writers. And to take the statements of these writers apart from their original intentions is quite misleading. As we have seen, they sometimes produced not objective history but ideal history. To take their narratives undiscounted is like criticising a picture by an old master by comparing it with a photograph. It is like the method of the followers of Euemerus, who through not understanding the true nature of myth, turned it straight into narrative, and so instead of extracting history out of myth only succeeded, as I have already observed, in foisting myth into history. The Euemerists were the historic critics of a scientific age, but they lacked historic imagination and the comparative method, and so they failed. We must also fail if we persist, in defiance of the clearest evidence, in supposing that the writers of ancient history were possessed by a love of fact as fact comparable to ours, and cared for nothing but to make their picture a naturalistic transcript from life.

The general character of history writing in antiquity is well set forth by a learned recent German writer<sup>1</sup>: "None of the ancient writers intended simply to describe real life or actual personalities; this would have seemed to them a breach of the laws of art. Even the historians did not set in the first place the establishment of the naked truth, but the production of a certain effect on their readers. Thus at best they have presented to us pictures of individuals exaggerated into types; often they have merely set up examples with a view to moral edification or warning; very generally they have given us rhetorical exaggerations or caricatures of the truth. The few exceptions serve but to prove the rule."

Before we attempt to apply the methods of modern historic realism to historic narratives, we must, as a preliminary, if we

<sup>1</sup> A. Bauer, *Die Forschungen zur Griechischen Geschichte*, 1888-1898, p. 3.

can, remove from them the admixture of idea and purpose. If we want chemically to analyse even a mollusc, we must begin by taking from it the breath of life, to the analysis of which our chemical methods are not equal. And if we want to discern the hard facts hidden in a fabric of history constructed with a purpose, we must first of all remove the purpose with all that depends on it. If, as is often the case, we cannot compass this introductory operation, then we must be content to take the narrative as it stands, as belonging to another sphere than that of objective history, as more closely related to the practical world of idea and purpose than to that of actual fact.

Thus beside the narrow canal of objective history runs a broader and a more varied stream of ideal history, the history not of that which is known to have taken place, but of that which was supposed to have taken place. Where we have a variety of historians we always have a variety of accounts; nor is it hard to see how that variety arises. One thing doubtless happened; but the various spectators, filled with ideas and anticipations of their own, saw that one thing variously, even apart from any bias of conscious purpose. Thus many accounts of what had taken place arose, and passed in the mouths of men. Among these accounts there was a struggle for existence; some faded away, and others won general acceptance and were woven into the web of that established convention which was generally believed to be history.

In the struggle for existence much depends on the environment. Now we know what is the environment in which narratives of events have had to make good their claim to existence. It is human nature. And in the composition of mankind, the love of precise accuracy is a very feeble motive compared with many others, personal, social, religious. The tales which pleased had an enormous advantage over those which merely informed; and those which conveyed an acceptable moral triumphed over those which were dull records. Thus the subjective elements of human nature were ever present in the moulding of the evidence out of which historians had to spin their webs. Even in the current accounts of events so near us as the battle of Waterloo, or the surrender

at Sedan, there is an immense element of subjectivity, and as we work our way back to the misty days of antiquity this element grows ever larger and larger in proportion to the nucleus of fact.

It is clear that before our historical records can be treated as of objective validity, it would be necessary to extract from them this human bias. As a statement of scientific method, this thesis is above attack, and when it can be acted upon, it has an absolute claim. But unfortunately the removal of complicated and hardly traceable ancient bias by modern writers who are not without bias themselves, and very imperfectly acquainted with the atmosphere of bygone days, is a task in the great majority of cases of extreme difficulty. Ill-judged attempts in this direction are apt to land us in complete uncertainty.

Another observation has to be made. The notion that only objective history is of value is not founded. When we can reach objective or actual history, no doubt it is well to do so. But that ideal or subjective history is without importance to us is an utterly false view. Probably it has been imported into the domain of human history from the domain of physical science, which draws a hard and black line between fact and falsehood. But in very truth, it is often far more important to know what was believed to have taken place than what had really taken place. The former may have had a far stronger influence in human affairs than the latter.

To take an instance. The belief of the Greeks in the expedition of Agamemnon and the ten years' siege of Troy had in several crises of Greek history a very important effect upon politics. Whether as a matter of fact any such expedition of the combined Greeks in the heroic age took place is an interesting question which the progress of archaeology may one day enable us to answer. But whether or not such expedition really took place, the belief that it had taken place is a constant factor in actual Greek history. He who should exclude all mention of it from the Greek annals because it was probably mythical would be a pedant.

There has certainly been a tendency among historians who prided themselves on being scientific towards excluding from

history what has been shown to be probably of subjective origin. In so far as they have gone beyond true measure in this matter, it is due to that crude application of the methods of lower science in higher science of which I have spoken in an earlier chapter. The prejudice haunts us all, and it is not easy to overcome it. When we learn that some particular event recorded in history belongs not to the objective element in it, but to that which is subjective and human, we are apt to feel like men who have been deceived, and to expel the intruding account with contumely. Thereby we show that we think too highly of the things of sense, and too meanly of man. The disease is deep-seated, and it will take a long while to cure it.

When Strabo tells us that he regards it as dishonouring to the genius of Homer to suppose that the events which he records are mere fictions, we smile. But on many faces the smile would at once die away if it were added that in the Bible also there is an immense deal of ethical and poetic construction of history. As I propose to dwell on this certain truth, I wish at once and most strongly to protest against the notion that ideal and subjective history at all necessarily savours of imposture, or should be made war on in the interests of science. We must criticise and distinguish; but after our criticism we must have the courage to reject the vulgar error that all in the sacred narratives which does not satisfy our tests of objectivity is necessarily dross. If it does not meet the historic test, it may meet another of a more human and practical kind. If it does not belong to time and space it may belong to the diviner realm of ideas, and embody truths compared to which material facts are poor and empty of meaning.

What we have to learn is to give to history that which belongs to history, and to idea that which belongs to idea. It is for critical history to determine the character of the writings of early Christianity, their origin, and the medium in which the writers lived. And it is for a sane theology to preserve for the lasting good of mankind the noble ideas as to God and man and the Founder of our religion, which the evangelists embodied to the best of their ability in narrative.



Now this problem which lies before us in regard to Biblical history is almost exactly parallel to the problem which lay before our fathers and our grandfathers in regard to Biblical science; and which in our days may be regarded as practically solved.

There was a time, a time within the memory of many of us, when there was a painful collision between the methods and results of physical science and these same Biblical narratives of ours. It was thought that there was danger to the Christian faith in allowing that the world was more than six thousand years old; and it was regarded as impious in an astronomer to assert that the sun could not possibly have stood still at the bidding of Joshua. Able and learned men gave up their lives to the attempt to reconcile the data of geology with the narrative of *Genesis*, or to showing that the star which shone over the cradle of Bethlehem might be an ordinary phenomenon of nature. That strife has passed, it is to be hoped, for ever. However good a Christian a geologist might be, in our day he would not seriously quote a verse of *Genesis* as an authority in this subject. However pious an astronomer might be, he would not try to modify his view of the apparent motion of the sun to suit the tale about Joshua. And the ordinary educated Christian no longer goes to the Bible for facts of geologic or biologic science, but for moral and religious principles, for encouragement in life and hope in death. It is not the purpose of the Bible, men are agreed, to teach us facts about the world, which we can easily learn by the use of our own faculties, but to help us in the higher life, and to tell us truths of a nobler kind than we could have reached for ourselves. And educated Christians are generally agreed that truth of a higher kind is to be found in some of these narratives of the Bible which least accord with the actual fact. The divine purpose and meaning of the world shines out in the Hebrew myth of the creation; and it was precisely the desire to set forth that purpose and meaning which was the original motive of the author of *Genesis*.

We shall have to learn to take in the case of historic science the same line which we have followed with so much success in the case of physical science. We must allow



criticism to employ in the case of Biblical history the same methods which experience has shown to be successful in other parts of the realm of history. We cannot abandon those methods or dispute the results to which they lead without wilful blindness. But the mind can only exert its power of judging in certain directions. There is much in the realm of aspiration, passion, will, and spiritual experience with which it can deal but very imperfectly. Let it exert to the utmost all its powers, and let us gratefully accept all that it can discover for us. But at the best our knowledge, especially in the realm of history, is hemmed in by narrow limits, and floats like a small star in the infinite space of the ideal.

There is an actual truth to visible fact; and there is a higher truth to the nature of man and of his spiritual environment. To the first teachers of Christianity, the latter of these kinds of truth seemed to be all-important, and mere truth of fact a trifle in comparison. In order to understand their writings, we must use their eyes. We must try to discover what were the realities which they sought to embody in narrative as well as in doctrine, and to use these truths for the benefit of aspiration and conduct.

Thus criticism corrects the crudeness of criticism. We learn that the most important function of critical investigation of ancient history lies in the examination of documents and of historians. This has been more generally recognised in Germany than among us. And in Germany an immense impetus has been given to *Quellenlehre*, the tracing to ultimate sources of all the statements of historians, and the attempt to estimate the value of those sources.

Criticism is at once legitimate and necessary; and has become a condition and preliminary of all attempts at historic construction. But it cannot furnish us with the principles of historic construction. For them we must look elsewhere. The root principle of all historic construction must be sought in the theory of evolution.

Taking the events of ancient history one by one, it may well seem an almost hopeless task to determine how much truth there is in our accounts of each. Grote frankly gave up all attempts to produce any history of Greece before the

beginning of the Olympiads, and contented himself with repeating tales as they are told by ancient writers. But we now know that the line drawn at the first Olympiad, which Grote supposed to be firmly fixed, is probably invented and arbitrary, and the torrent of scepticism, passing that puny barrier, has flowed far down in Greek history. The case is the same in regard to most of ancient history. But when evolution is accepted and thoroughly understood in its bearing upon history, it colligates all the detached facts into groups, and so gives them a power of resistance which otherwise they could never have had. When every phenomenon in ancient history is regarded as on the road from one point as to which we have evidence to another point as to which we have evidence, then the whole fabric gains strength and coherence.

The historian as such is certainly bound to accept the theory of development, that every movement arises out of other movements, and must be studied in relation to its environment. But there is another side to the matter which is scarcely less important, and which is far more commonly overlooked. Every historian worthy of the name now writes more or less completely under the dominion of the idea of evolution. But many writers fail to see the limits of evolution as applied to history, and the natural prejudices of the evolutionary method, against which one has to guard one's self.

The more a historian is possessed by the genius of evolution, the more likely he is to disregard that in history which is most human and most divine. A great man may appear to him to be merely the result of his antecedents and the voice of his age, and what specially belongs to him as a man, character, will, inspiration, is thrust into the background. The features of personality no man borrows from his predecessors, nor can he transmit them to his followers; they are not his, they are himself. It is going too far to suppose with Carlyle that history is made by the successive personalities and inspirations of heroes; but it is a mistake quite as fatal to suppose that history works itself out, apart from the character and purposes of the great men of history. On the average these special forces of character and purpose tend in the long run to cancel each other, yet they cannot be overlooked. History is like a

river. If one knows its source, and the direction which it must take, one can tell what sea it will eventually reach ; yet its course is not direct, but bent in this direction and that by the resistance of intervening hills and rocks. The extreme historical evolutionist wants to see history like a river which runs in a straight line from source to mouth, and regards aberrations as defects to be smoothed down as far as possible.

It is not difficult to prove that advanced historians sometimes mistake the prejudices of their method for objective tendencies of human progress. Take the following thesis, "History is only possible on the presupposition of the absolute continuity and homogeneity of experience, and that presupposition is uprooted and annihilated by the presupposition of Revelation."<sup>1</sup>

In the word *history* in this statement there lurks a fatal ambiguity. Doubtless the presupposition of Revelation will do much to spoil the *writing* of history from the evolutionary point of view, because it will introduce at every point in the past the working of a force which cannot be weighed and measured. But to say that it is therefore excluded from the course of history, that is, of human affairs, is to endeavour to construct all human progress on the basis of a subjective necessity, almost of a convenience.

Thus the more scientific in the evolutionary sense of the word our writing of history becomes, the more we shall find in it a process of levelling down. Great men will shrink, good men become commonplace, bad men have redeeming qualities ; our light and shade will become so gentle that there will be little to strike the eye or to impress the imagination.

Every psychologist knows that to the outer world as it exists in experience and knowledge many elements are contributed subjectively. Each of us, in a sense, builds for himself an outer world. Still stronger is the subjective element which must be mingled in any rendering or any construction of history. An utterly objective history of any event or any period is an impossibility. Testimony may furnish us

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Macan, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, p. 116. Mr. Macan qualifies this statement in many ways ; I do not quote it as his view, but only as a clear statement of the view natural to the evolutionist as such.

with the bricks of which our historic evidence is composed, but that which binds the bricks together, and the whole form and purpose of the house, must be to a large extent provided from within. Will and character lie at the basis of historic knowledge, even more essentially than they lie at the basis of knowledge of the material world. We make our historic world, as we make the physical world, though at the same time we are made by it.

That which we contribute from within to the fabric of history consists partly in a personal bias, which can never be wholly set aside, and partly in the results of present experience. When we perceive certain forces and tendencies at work around us, we cannot help assuming that they worked also in past times. We must needs explain the past by the present, and model the past on the analogy of the present. Historians of past generations were unconsciously under the spell of this tendency. We are conscious of it; but it acts nevertheless. We have, however, learned to keep it in bounds, and to temper it by constant resort to the most objective tests to which history can be submitted.

The thing of most practical moment is to ascertain, so far as possible, some means of reconciliation of the demands of the intellect, which will not be set aside, and the dictates of the practical faculties, which also demand a place in our views of the world. And the analogies of art and government, on which we have dwelt in a previous chapter, at once suggest to us the line which the reconciliation is likely to take. Modern art has to make great concessions to naturalism, and modern government to democracy; yet art can only be kept alive by style, and government by organisation. So history must frankly accept the doctrine of development, and yet keep itself from inanity and death by insisting on the presence in history, through all developments and amid all clashes of force, of will, character, and divine inspiration.

The active powers which find in the events of every day divine control, in spite of the apparent fixity of law, find also in history a divine revelation in spite of the apparent domination of might and the survival of the fittest. Looked at from without the course of history may seem fortuitous,

blind, and unmeaning, the fitter who survives being often inferior to the less fit who perishes. But looked at from within, history must seem to those who have a religion and believe in a God, a revelation of progressive steps of certain divine ideas ; a revelation slow, halting, and imperfect, and yet unresting.

It needs but little array of proof to show that the great change in the manner in which history is regarded has had profound effects on the foundation and the structure of religious doctrine. From the first ages of Christianity certain processes have been going on, of which we now for the first time fully see the scope and results. In the earliest formulation of the Christian Creed, we find not only statements as to the nature of God and of man, but also definite historic assertions as to the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Founder of Christianity. And as in after ages the Creeds developed, these historic assertions became constantly more definite and more numerous. Not only assertions as to the life of the Founder, but statements as to the Creation, as to the Fall of Adam, the calling of Abraham, and the like, became definitely incorporated into the expression of the Christian faith. For a while this subordination of history to ethical principle and spiritual meaning was quite natural, and had no evil effect. But when in more modern times the conception of history gradually changed, difficulties began to arise. The assertions of the Creeds in regard to history were taken to be that for which they were never meant, purely colourless and objective statements of fact ; and instead of being regarded as outgrowth and embodiment of ideas, they were placed under doctrine to form its support. At the present day the great majority of professing Christians think that the foundation of their faith rests on historic facts ; and view not merely with apprehension, but with anger and indignation, any attempt to invalidate those facts.

One Christian will say that unless the fall of Adam was historic fact, the redemption by Jesus Christ, which is its remedy, cannot be historic, and so his faith is made vain. Another will say that unless Jesus was born of a virgin mother, he could not be the Son of God or the Saviour of



men. Yet it is certain that neither of these supposed historical events can be established upon evidence such as is required in secular history in order to establish an event as accepted. Are, then, these Christians willing to found their creed on evidence which would be held insufficient to prove the most insignificant fact of ancient history?

The more thoughtful and liberal of modern religious authorities have passed beyond this stage, but not with full consistency or a complete realisation of the position. They are willing to allow the rights of criticism, but they do not seem prepared for the remorseless logic with which those rights, if once allowed, will be exercised.

That English theologians have not yet faced the position which has arisen may be judged from the writings of one of the wisest of them, Dr. Talbot.<sup>1</sup> In one of his excellent discourses he says, in regard to the Old Testament Scriptures, that we should be "quite ready to leave scholars and historians to test and try all questions about the making of the books, and find out for us to the best of their power what the truth is; but that the value of the books for us goes deeper than all that, and that it is to be found in the spiritual truths which God has made them the means of teaching us." Here Dr. Talbot goes very far, even further than is necessary, since he is willing to refer Scripture history to a historical tribunal, without warning his hearers that such a tribunal may have misleading prepossessions of its own. But on the very next page the writer assumes the historic truth of the very narratives which he is willing to submit to a critical tribunal. He asserts that the miracle of the passage of the Red Sea "set a stamp upon Israel which was never lost." I think that almost any impartial historian would hold that he puts cause for effect, and effect for cause. It was not the passage of the Red Sea which proved Israel to be the people of God; but the conviction of Israel that it was the people of God which embodied itself in the story of the miracle at the Red Sea.

If the historic accuracy of the Old Testament is to be submitted to experts for judgment, it does not do to assume in

<sup>1</sup> At present Bishop of Rochester. See his *Leeds Parish Church Sermons*, p. 118.



the meantime that judgment will go one way. And further, whatever course is taken with regard to the history of the Old Testament must also be taken in regard to the history of the New. Would Dr. Talbot be ready to submit the fact of the Resurrection, for example, to scholars and historians, to "find out to the best of their power what the truth is?"

The following chapters may be regarded as an attempt to solve the problems thus raised. They are an endeavour to give to history that which is history's, and to idea that which is ideal. But the solution seems to me to be a matter of infinite difficulty. It is not to be reached by the assumption of the infallibility of Scripture. And it is not to be reached by giving over religious history to the full sweep of historical scepticism. Criticism must first prune the excesses of criticism. An observant psychology must see how far it is reasonable to indulge the merely destructive power of reasoning. Investigation of the real nature of truth and the real nature of illusion must serve to guide us in one of these middle courses hateful to all partisans of extremes, but helpful to those who love neither extreme, but who stand near the true path of progress, midway between them.

No doubt the principles of historic criticism have not taken possession of the minds of ordinary educated people as have the main principles of science. For that reason my course will seem to many overstrained and pedantic. Where historic criticism does not rule, the ideal construction of history is quite easy and natural. For example, many will be ready to accept the view that "a being unexampled and unique will come into the world in an unique way." And this thesis will make acceptable to them some of the early Christian statements which are repugnant to strict historic science. I have no wish to attack these more conservative schools. By all means let them retain their ideal history as long as they can. The points in which I differ from them are of small importance in comparison with the points in which I agree with them. But my endeavour is to raise a solid wall of defence for what is essential in Christianity by taking as a foundation the bed-rock of verifiable truth.

Nothing is more common than for well-educated men to

say, "Prove to me that such and such an event of early Christian history did not happen, and I will give it up; meantime I claim a right to accept it." This is, however, to make a serious mistake in the logic of historic knowledge.

It is not reasonable to expect in history the same kind of demonstration which one requires in matters of science. The cosmogony in Genesis cannot maintain itself as a record of literal fact, because the progress of science has shown that the world took form otherwise, and acquired living inhabitants otherwise. But when we show the unsatisfactory character of much early Christian history, we cannot thus rigidly demonstrate its incorrectness, nor can we put something more satisfactory once for all in its place. Events in past history can seldom be rigidly proved or disproved. Commonly they can only be shown to be probable or improbable. Thus the question is not whether some particular event in the evangelic history can be proved not to have taken place. The question is a broader one: whether we shall deal with the testimony of the Evangelists as we are accustomed to deal with the testimony of other ancient writers. And we must either deal with them thus or else blindly accept their testimony, so far as they can be reconciled one to another.

Yet if we look at the progress of the educated world we shall see that certain views as to what may be accepted and what must be rejected from the historic standpoint are steadily making way. Many widely-held views as to what occurred in the foundation of our religion are being put out of court, not by being disproved, but in consequence of a slowly progressing change of mental attitude among those who have studied history in a scientific spirit.

To those who now visit Jerusalem there are pointed out the spots where all the most noteworthy events connected with the life of Jesus took place, not only the Via Dolorosa and Gethsemane, the place of crucifixion and the place of sepulture, but also many other spots. There can be little doubt that to the crowds of pilgrims, Russian, Armenian, and the rest, it is a great help to faith thus to stand at the very spot where took place the sufferings of their Master and the miracles of early Christianity. Yet no educated person would dispute the right

of archaeologists to discuss the value of these local assignments, or to point out the insufficiency of the evidence on which many of them rest. Scientific archaeology must needs keep itself free to judge by evidence and to judge impartially, even in the sacred air of Jerusalem. It would be a mere folly to disturb the devoted worship of Christian pilgrims by bringing before them historic doubts whether the associations which they attach to various spots in the sacred city belong legitimately to those spots. But it would be an equal folly to write on the topography of the city with a mind under the dominion of the sacred associations of worship. And the most ruthless topographical sceptic, though he must expect to be misunderstood by Russian and Armenian peasants, can always take a higher line even in piety than they if he quotes the reply of the angels, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

The historic criticism of the life of Jesus stands on precisely the same scientific basis as topographic criticism at Jerusalem. By it also in some cases illusions useful to faith may be destroyed. But it has also no need to be actively iconoclastic, and can in the last resort maintain that worship in the spirit is consistent with any historical views which the progress of inquiry may force on our acceptance.

My position, briefly stated, is this: (1) As regards the documents of Christianity, criticism must be allowed free course, though to be satisfactory it must be appreciative, and therefore reverent; (2) As regards the teaching of the Founder of Christianity, we are by no means ill-informed; (3) As regards the events of his life, we are unable in the present state of our knowledge to discern between fact and fable, but events strictly miraculous rest on no sufficient evidence; (4) As regards the founding of the Christian faith, the course of history can only be accounted for by the supposition of a divine inspiration of the Founder and his disciples, an inspiration which has lasted down to our times.

The inevitable corollary of these views is that the evidence for the truth of Christian teaching can no longer rest mainly on the events of the life of Jesus Christ. In the main it must rest on the experience of individuals and of the community.

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It cannot be said that Christian doctrine is thus detached from history, but it is detached from definite events of history, and attached to the general course of events, as interpreted by the Christian experience of our own and previous ages.

I shall proceed to consider in order, first, the early Christian documents ; second, the teaching of Jesus ; third, the events of his life ; and fourth, the history of the early Church in its relation to Christian doctrine.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GOSPELS

IF we take up almost any theological work we shall find it stated that Jesus did this or said that; and a footnote giving a reference to any one of the Gospels, even the Fourth, passes as a sufficient justification. When the Gospels are thus quoted as a final court of appeal it is assumed that they are infallible, or at all events that they were written by careful witnesses to preserve in a perfectly white light the actual words and deeds of the Master. It is assumed that none of the authors of the Gospels had any subjective bias, and that the principles of evidence by which they went were such as prevail in our law-courts. No view could be further from the truth than this. In dealing with any ancient historians there are two things which are imperatively necessary. First, we must consider what were their sources of information. And second, we must consider what was the subjective bias of each, what was his purpose in writing, and what the elements which he added from his own mind to the testimony coming from without. If the Gospels were, as our ancestors held, dictated by the Spirit of God, it is impiety to criticise them at all. But if they are to be criticised, they must be examined according to the recognised canons of historic study. As Freeman<sup>1</sup> well observes, "No spirit can be more directly opposed to any method of sound historical study than one which puts any writer, however illustrious, beyond the reach of that process

<sup>1</sup> *Methods of Historical Study*, p. 216.

of comparison and criticism which is the very life of all historical research."

True historic method would suggest that in this as in other cases we should begin our investigation with the earliest and the most authentic of the Christian writings, the Epistles of Paul. But as regards the life of his Master, the witness of Paul is of little value. It does not appear that Paul ever saw or heard Jesus. And although he had good opportunities of learning the facts from those who had been the immediate followers of Jesus, he certainly did not greatly care\* to use those opportunities. According to his own statement in *Galatians*, he did not after his conversion hasten to visit the Apostles and to be instructed by them. But for some years he remained in Arabia and Damascus, and at the end of that time went to Jerusalem, where he stayed but fifteen days with Peter, seeing none of the Apostles save Peter and James. His comparative indifference to the facts of the life of Jesus is accounted for in his Epistles. The death of Jesus interests him more than the doings and even the teachings of the Master; and the exalted Christ tends to overshadow the historic Christ. He preaches less Jesus the Messiah than Christ crucified. The line which is taken in this whole matter by St. Paul is extremely suggestive and interesting, but it makes his testimony to his Master's life very scanty.

We pass then to the Gospels. We have four accounts of the life of Jesus, whereof the fourth stands apart, and is doubtless of later date, while the other three clearly go back to a common tradition and show among themselves a strong family likeness. It seems now to be generally allowed that the Synoptic Gospels, though they contain later interpolations, were produced nearly in their present form between about 65 A.D. and the year A.D. 100. Whether Christian tradition rightly assigns their authorship is doubtful, and this is a question into which I cannot enter.

The three Synoptic Gospels, when critically compared, reveal very different points of view and varying conceptions of the Master. A thorough examination of the personalities of the three authors is the necessary preliminary to any intelligent study of the life of Jesus. This has been attempted by many



writers; <sup>1</sup> it is quite clear that there is no room for such an attempt in the present work. Mark is more simple, adding little to the traditions which he repeats except perhaps occasional graphic details. Matthew is more attracted by the discourses than the miracles of Jesus. His incorporation of these discourses in the traditional narrative is often somewhat arbitrary. He is evidently a Jew of a high type: one who was able really to appreciate his Master's teaching, though not free from some Jewish faults, such as a tendency to fanciful interpretation of prophecy. \* Luke occupies an intermediate position between the first two Gospels and the Fourth. We see in his case more clearly than in Mark a personal bias. He is a lover of poverty, fond of miracle, inclining to sentiment. His Gospel is *par excellence* that of the humble and meek. Women play in it a greater part than in other Gospels, and the author is more disposed than other evangelists to colour his narrative. As M. Renan puts it, though too strongly, "Le vrai matériel n'est rien pour lui; l'idée, le but dramatique et moral sont tout." <sup>2</sup>

All the Synoptic Gospels were put together out of existing material. This material was the floating legend which arose during the half century after the crucifixion, and by degrees had passed from the oral into the written stage. Both external and internal evidence indicate Peter as the principal channel of the tradition, though doubtless there were contributions from other quarters. But through what channels the Petrine tradition found its way into the Gospels we do not with any certainty know. We can discern three principal sources used by the Synoptists:

(1) A narrative, often called the common tradition, which lies at the basis of the narrative in all the Synoptic Gospels, but is most closely reproduced in *Mark*.

(2) A summary of the discourses or *logia* of Jesus, mainly to be found in *Matthew*.

(3) A separate set of discourses, used by Luke in his chapters ix.-xviii. This section contains some of the most beautiful of the Parables of Jesus, such as the tales of the Good

<sup>1</sup> Easily accessible to English readers is the able analysis by Dr. Abbott in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; art. "Gospels," vol. x. p. 801.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Évangiles*, p. 262.

Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. We cannot doubt that this source is as authentic as that used by Matthew; but it is notable that between the two collections of discourses there is a marked difference of character, as every careful reader of the Bible must have noticed.

As regards the Fourth Gospel it is exceedingly difficult to write briefly. Its authorship, origin, and date are matters of constant dispute. It is impossible for me to discuss these questions: I can only state the view assumed in this book in regard to the Gospel. Though it is marked by style and thought as a unity, it is composed of curiously assorted elements. It certainly incorporates very valuable and probably authentic traditions of some events in the life of Jesus. But this nucleus of fact is overlaid by a remarkable doctrinal construction, in which the tendencies and the style of the author are conspicuous. By any writer who tries to reconstruct a life of Jesus, the Johannine narratives of the last supper, the crucifixion, and other events must be carefully weighed. But the writer who is concerned with the teaching rather than with the life of Jesus will find it impossible to reconcile the accounts of it given by the Synoptists on the one hand and the Fourth Evangelist on the other. So much results from the study of the book itself. If it was written by a personal follower of Jesus, the words of the Master must have marvelously grown and changed their character in his mind. If it was written by a Christian of the second generation, he must have used notes or materials furnished by an eye-witness. To both of these alternatives there are very grave objections; yet one or the other must be true. It is safest to attribute the Gospel merely to the "school of Ephesus," and to leave its authorship in doubt. In the next chapter I shall return to this Gospel; in the present chapter I shall deal with the Synoptists.

There can be no question that alike in the writers of our Gospels and in the sources which they used, whether oral or written, there was a large subjective element. The deeds and words of Jesus are not brought before us as they would be by a modern reporter or a critical historian. No one would in these days accuse the writers of our Gospels of imposture, or

any intentional or culpable perversion of facts. But unless they were verbally inspired, they must have been subject to the mental conditions of the time, and written according to the prevailing tendencies and customs, as well as with personal prepossessions.

The subjective medium through which they would look on the world of experience would be partly of Hellenistic or Greek, and partly of Jewish origin.

At the time when the Gospels were written, or when the mass of tradition incorporated into them was formed, the whole population bordering on the Eastern Mediterranean had undergone for three centuries, under the dominion first of Alexander and his successors and afterwards of the Romans, a rough training in the philosophy, the literature, and the arts of Greece. This training had not sunk deep. We must not, of course, for a moment fancy that the Athens of Pericles and Demosthenes had educated the world to anything like its own level. But the Greek language had spread on all sides, and with the language had spread a certain kind of civilisation. No doubt in some parts, in Persia, for example, and Egypt and Judæa, the national life had made a vigorous, and to some extent a successful, effort to resist the encroachments of the Greek spirit. But as is always the way in such cases, the tide of influence was far too subtle and insinuating to be stopped by open opposition. I have no wish to exaggerate the Hellenisation of the East at the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>1</sup> But it seems certain that it had gone so far as to produce a certain rough uniformity of culture and mental habits in all Eastern parts of the Roman world. At Jerusalem it met with the most bitter opposition; but even in Jerusalem a Greek party existed. In Galilee the influences of Hellenism found freer course, though, of course, among a race so simple and rural in their habits and tastes as the Galileans, only a very superficial layer of Greek cultivation can be supposed.

The late Greek or Hellenistic tendencies which would dominate the genesis and the writing of history may be judged

<sup>1</sup> An excellent estimate of the extent to which it had reached will be found at the beginning of Hansrath's *New Testament Times*, translated in the Library of the Theological Translation Fund.

from the literary works which have come down to us, especially such works as those of Josephus, Plutarch, and Diodorus. The comparatively severe historic method of Thucydides belonged to a wonderful age, that of the highest bloom of the Athenian intellect. Polybius also stands by himself. In later and inferior writers we generally find but a faint echo of the principles of Thucydides, mingled with rhetorical and popular tendencies, which overlaid the search for historic truth with a development in which desire, imagination, and love of effect had a great part.

Probably at that time in all the Levant the true myth-making age was over. But the faculties which had been employed in the construction of myth were still at work. And they found their natural field in the adaptation of history to national and ethical purpose. The more historic spirit of which Thucydides is the representative might in some degree sway the educated. But the mass of the people were prepared to accept historical accounts not by the strict rules of evidence, but accordingly as it satisfied certain inner needs or agreed with existing feelings. Few indeed had reached that stage of veneration for fact at which a historian accepts on evidence a tale which conflicts with cherished beliefs, and rejects for want of evidence a tale which has an acceptable moral.

Our Gospels belong to the great formative time, when the great ideas of Christianity were surging up, when inspiration flowed to mankind in a broad stream, and found itself a place amid worldly surroundings with a rapidity which is astonishing. Some geologists hold that there have been periods in the history of our planet when all the processes of biologic evolution took place with far greater rapidity than now. There have also been times of sudden growth of mankind. The first half of the fifth century B.C. was to the Greek spirit such a time, when art, poetry, the drama, all the great fruits of Hellenic genius, suddenly ripened. Such a time to the Teutonic spirit was the age of Luther and of Calvin, when great systems of doctrine arose suddenly. Such was the earliest age of Christianity, of which the New Testament is the eternal fruit. But great times of creation are of all times least critical. Personality and the bias which goes with it are at

their strongest, while the absence of self-consciousness prevents men from taking precautions against their own bias, or being at all aware of it. It is precisely the power of the inspiration of the early Church which makes the life of Jesus, from the critical and historic point of view, so embarrassing.

The traditions of the life of Mohammed, which were handed down by his immediate followers, were at least as rigidly examined by authority as the traditions of the life of Jesus. The phrases in which a skilled and impartial authority, Sir W. Muir, speaks of the former apply undesignedly to the latter also. "We see," he writes, "how entirely tradition, as now possessed by us, rests its authority on the memory of those who handed it down; and how dependent, therefore, it must have been upon their convictions and their prejudices. . . . There may everywhere be traced the indirect but not less powerful and dangerous influence of a steadily working bias, which insensibly gave its colour and its shape to all the stories of their Prophet treasured up in the memories of the believers." Of course, when Sir W. Muir speaks of prejudice and of dangerous bias, he writes from the purely historic point of view. From the religious point of view, it might be that the bias was for the good of the Mohammedan church.

It is not difficult to select clear examples in which the surroundings of the early church appear to have given colour to the life and to the discourses of Jesus.

We find in *Matthew* x. 16-24, a charge given to the twelve Apostles adapted not to the circumstances of the time, but to those of later times. "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child." "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Such language as this belongs to a time of bitter persecution, such persecution as that carried on by St. Paul before his conversion. In the life of Jesus there was no persecution, no betrayal to death of one disciple by another. Nor is there anything to show that the words of the Master have reference to the remote future: they are on the face of them words of counsel as to immediate behaviour. The best clue as to the origin of the whole discourse is furnished by the words, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, until the Son of man be come." These



words seem to indicate decisively a time shortly after the crucifixion, while the disciples were still confined to Judaea, and expected almost daily their Master's return in the clouds of heaven. According to the rules of historic criticism, they must then have made their way into the oral tradition; but as to their origin we are ignorant, nor can we do more than conjecture whether there may lie at their basis any actual words of Jesus himself.

In the chapter of this work which deals with the parables other cases will be pointed out in which the teaching of Jesus seems to have been misrepresented by his disciples. No doubt the criticism which attempts to point out these blemishes is risky. It must go largely on subjective impressions, and it is apt to become superficial. It is very seldom that an interpolation or misrepresentation can be strictly proved; at most it can be made probable to an open and unprejudiced mind. In such matters critic differs from critic. For example, some commentators think that the words in the Sermon on the Mount, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," cannot have come from the lips of Jesus, but must have originated in the ultra Jewish section of the primitive church. But others think that in their context these words may have a meaning not inconsistent with the teaching which follows them. The matter might be discussed at great length without reaching any certain conclusion. Of course the same thing holds in case of the criticism of the text of ancient writers generally. All critics of the *Iliad* agree that it contains various additions and interpolations, but they are divided as to what those additions and interpolations are. There are more revolutionary and more conservative schools of Homeric criticism. In just the same way, setting aside the notion of verbal inspiration of the Gospels, all critics will allow that the reported sayings of Jesus must have suffered in the way both of addition and of loss during the time when they were passed from disciple to disciple by verbal tradition. But it will be the tendency of some schools to reduce this contamination to the lowest point, while other schools will be disposed to magnify it.

Perhaps the clearest proof of contamination which can be



produced results from a comparison of *Matthew* v. with *Luke* vi. In *Luke* the magnificently spiritual beatitudes of *Matthew* are repeated in a sadly inferior form. For Matthew's "blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke reads, "blessed are ye poor." For Matthew's "blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," Luke has "blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled." And so in other cases. The differences are very suggestive. They show how easy it was to misunderstand, and to receive on a lower level, the noble spiritual teaching of Jesus. For we should probably suppose that the text of Matthew is the more authentic record of his words.<sup>1</sup> And we thus receive a useful warning, that we must not in any mechanical or uncritical way receive as coming from Jesus all that the Synoptists put into his mouth.

We might have expected to find, as we do in fact find, that existing feelings and beliefs largely modified the life of Jesus as accepted by the early Christians. In the later Apocryphal Gospels we can clearly see how a particular bias of doctrine induced the writers to modify traditional events in the life of the Master. For example, in the newly discovered fragment of the *Gospel of Peter*, we can see running through the narrative of the sufferings of Jesus there set forth the influence of the Docetic scheme of doctrine. The Synoptic Gospels are too early in construction to show in many cases influence of Christian doctrine, which had not as yet been formulated. But in a few cases we can see clearly a doctrinal bias even in some of our Gospel narratives.

A clear and perspicuous example of the way in which history in the Gospels may spring from a root of doctrine may be found in a comparison of the accounts given us by the Third and Fourth Evangelists respectively of the events of the last few days of the Master's life. According to Luke, Jesus ate the last supper with his disciples on the 14th of the month Nisan, which was the regular day of the Jewish feast of the Passover, and was put to death on the following day. According to John, Jesus ate the last supper on the 13th of Nisan, the day

<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is not the view of every one. For example, Wendt, in his *Teaching of Jesus*, regards the record of Luke as more authentic.

before the Passover feast, and suffered death on the 14th. If we inquire into the meaning of this curious variation in so simple a matter of fact as the day of the death of Jesus, we at once see that it is of doctrinal significance. To Luke the Lord's Supper is a perpetuation in the church of the Jewish Paschal meal. To John, Jesus is himself the Paschal lamb, and must have been slain at the very time at which the lamb was sacrificed according to Hebrew ritual. Of course, Christian Apologists have tried to reconcile the two accounts; but this cannot be done in accordance with the canons of history. It is quite uncertain which date for the Crucifixion is the true one. One would naturally suppose that the Synoptic writers would be more trustworthy in such a matter than the Fourth Evangelist. Yet some able modern critics lean in this case to the accuracy of the Johannine chronology.<sup>1</sup> But the point which calls for notice is this, that in both the two versions the date of the crucifixion does not stand detached as a fact of chronology, but is the crown and consummation of a whole series of events. Luke gives a history of the events of the last days which can only be reconciled with his date for the crucifixion, while the history recorded by John can only be reconciled with the date which he adopts. In Luke the sending of Peter and John (xxii. 8), the arrangements for the feast, the solemn words with which Jesus begins the celebration, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," all indicate and lead up to the fact that the supper is one of the solemn festivals of the Jewish church. In John the last supper has quite another aspect. It is held "before the feast of the passover," it has none of the character of a solemn festival; the arrest and execution of Jesus take place on the day of passover, but before the solemn feast has begun; and his body is taken down from the cross before sunset, in order that it may not defile the sacredness of the feast and the coming Sabbath.

It is clear that in this case one Evangelist or the other, or one of the sources from which they respectively draw, must have constructed a whole series of current tales into an ideal

<sup>1</sup> Spitta, for example, after a very careful investigation, decides in favour of the Fourth Gospel. See his *Urchristenthum*, p. 265.

history on a basis of doctrine. However, as we have already observed, such a basis is rare in our Gospels because of their early date. But the practical tendencies and necessities which were in later times to find for themselves a body of doctrine were already working beneath the surface. And we may often trace in the Evangelists the influence of controversy between the spokesmen of the Church and the Jews around them.

Though the earlier part of the book of *Acts* is not altogether a satisfactory historical document, yet it is very valuable for sketching the background against which the Gospels grew up. One thing in particular which it impresses on us is that the time was one of controversy. Everywhere the missionaries of the cross met opposition, and it was impossible that such opposition should fail to control the form taken by the earliest Christian teaching. And as the Gospels took form among the Jews, they are sure to be full of traces of Jewish opposition and scepticism. Now, as we learn from all the speeches in the earlier part of *Acts*, the Christian advocates were most concerned with one purpose, to prove Jesus to be the Messiah, and in arguing with the Jews to this end they necessarily appealed continually to the Scriptures. Here were documents which were allowed to be sacred by Jews, both Christian and anti-Christian. Both parties allowed that the question whether Jesus was the Messiah could best be solved by an appeal to Scripture, which was allowed to be full of Messianic prophecy. To judge from the speeches in *Acts* the Apostles did not usually appeal to their Master's teaching to prove his mission. They did not appeal with complete confidence to his reported miracles, since in the belief of the time Satan as well as God could grant power to work miracles. But they appealed with the greatest confidence to Messianic prophecy, and tried to show that the life of Jesus corresponded to it. Hence a double bias: to find an application to the life of Jesus in a great number of passages of the Old Testament, and to find passages in the traditional life of the Master which corresponded with Messianic prophecy. How the bias worked in one direction we can fairly judge: we know that it produced or encouraged an extremely uncritical and fanciful manner of

interpreting the Scriptures. Of this kind of exegesis the Gospels and Epistles are full. Every one who knows anything of Biblical criticism, knows how constantly the writers of the New Testament twist to a Messianic reference passages of the Psalms and prophets which were certainly written with quite another purpose. How far the bias worked in the other direction, in producing or encouraging an unhistoric way of dealing with the traditions of the Master's life, we cannot discern with the same accuracy. But it is not reasonable to doubt that the effect in this direction was great. It would act in distorting, not so much the words of the Master as his recorded deeds, his birth and ancestry, his manner of life, his person.

The early disciples felt bound to find in the life of Jesus events to correspond to that which they supposed to have been foretold by the prophets of the Messiah. And this feeling, strongly colouring the medium through which all tradition of the life of Jesus had to pass, could not fail to tinge that life. We must, of course, be careful not to exaggerate in this matter. It would be absurd to assume that a recorded event of Gospel history did not take place, merely because it conformed to prophecy. There can be no doubt that Strauss in his *Leben Jesu* carried the argument from prophecy to an absurd extreme. But even conservative critics must allow that the influence of which we have spoken really existed in the minds of the early disciples. In fact, the very naïve fashion in which passages of the prophets are cited in our canonical Gospels must have aroused the attention and awaked the suspicion of every intelligent reader of the Bible, although the phenomenon of which we speak is more prominent in the apocryphal than in the canonical Gospels. As in early Christian days an immense number of passages in the prophets were regarded as having a Messianic reference, and as every passage so interpreted had to be brought somehow into harmony with the biography of the Founder, it is clear that a whole forest of tares was constantly springing up to choke the wheat of true tradition.

"If we take," says Mr. Rendel Harris,<sup>1</sup> "the whole body

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, August 1893.

of early literature, of which the canonical Gospels form the centre and crown, including Apocalypses, party-Gospels, and the like, we shall find that there never was a body of history so overgrown with legend, and the major part of these legends result from the irregular study of the Old Testament, probably based on the synagogue method of the time of the early Christian teachers. This reaction of the prophecy upon history colours the style of authors and affects their statements; and it is only by a close and careful study of the writers and their methods that we are able to discriminate between what is a *bona fide* allusion in the Prophets, or what is a trick of style borrowed from the Prophets, or what is a pure legend invented out of the Prophets."

From the same paper of Mr. Rendel Harris we may take an instance for illustration. We read in Zechariah,<sup>1</sup> "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, the King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." What the original reference of this passage may have been it is needless to inquire. By the early Christians it was regarded as a Messianic prophecy; and they maintained that it met its fulfilment in the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding upon an ass. In describing this entry, Mark and Luke speak of the ass as a colt merely. Matthew, however, apparently misled by the words "an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass," which is really only a Hebrew reduplicated fashion of expressing an ass's colt, inserts another version which is scarcely to be reconciled with physical possibilities, "The disciples . . . brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their garments, and he sat thereon." If we come down a little later to the time of Justin, we shall find that the story has grown still more under the influence of the words of another prophecy, which also was twisted into a Messianic meaning.<sup>2</sup> "Judah is a lion's whelp, binding his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine." Justin then has the story that the disciples found the ass tied to a vine. It is needless to multiply instances when one is so clear. It is quite evident that when history was written by and for people in such a

<sup>1</sup> ix. 9.<sup>2</sup> Genesis xlix. 11.



frame of mind in regard to the fulfilment of prophecy, they could not have kept strictly to fact and evidence. And it is evident that our Gospels are by no means free from the results of this tendency.

But we have yet to mention what was perhaps the most important of all causes of transmutation of the tradition, the difficulty which the early disciples found in discriminating between what they gathered from the tablets of memory and what they saw with inward vision. The past and the present, dreams, revelations, and outward events, were all inextricably mingled in their minds. Of the frame of mind of the first Christians we may judge from the Gospels and the *Acts*, which, however unsatisfactory as narratives of events, certainly reflect the general tone of the time. In the beginning of the First Gospel the whole motive of the narrative is given by dreams and visions. In accounts such as those of the Temptation, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the inner and the outer vision are so confused together that we cannot disentangle them. Peter and Paul in several of the most momentous crises of their lives trust entirely to the direction of visions. All this indicates a remarkable frame of mind in the Church. The disciples seem to have lived with their whole souls intent on watching for heavenly visions and revelations of the Lord. What came to them by such a channel of communication would necessarily move them far more than the mere contents of memory. It was indeed a marvellous age, a time of inspiration, of the mixing of the human and the divine into a draught which should restore to health a sickening world. But what atmosphere could be less propitious to unimaginative history, to the writing of precise chronicle or the rigid guarding of chronology? However sacred the revelations vouchsafed to the early Church may have been, historic science can never allow objective value to a source of knowledge of past events so unmeasurable and so loaded with ethical elements.

A good instance to show how easily in that age idea might give birth to history may be found in the statement in all the Synoptic writers that at the moment of the death of Jesus the veil which in the Temple shut off the holiest place, into which only the high priest entered, was rent in twain. There is, of



course, no actual impossibility in such an event occurring. Yet to suppose that it did objectively take place is to violate the true historic spirit. The death of Jesus did, for his followers, open a way into the immediate presence of God; that was the fact of experience. It is a fact on which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews dwells at some length. Christ, he says,<sup>1</sup> "entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption," so that the veil no longer excludes his followers from it. But the writer of the Epistle is content with a doctrinal statement; he does not speak of any physical removing of the veil. The tradition which our evangelists follow prefers a historic to a doctrinal statement; the idea is projected into the substance of his narrative, not of conscious purpose, but by an inward instinct. Whether there was any outward occurrence which gave him an excuse for this procedure we can never know.

The *logia* or sayings of Jesus, which were probably often repeated by him on various occasions, would suffer least in oral transmission. As to the occasion and the setting of those sayings, there might well be various views, and the setting which seemed to the audience most suitable would in each case tend to prevail in the struggle for life. Parables would survive, but the background would be freely sketched in. As regards events, it is certain that the details of them would be reported with little accuracy, and that their whole complexion would depend on other considerations than respect for fact. It is impossible to conceive a more complete contrast than that which exists between the fashion in which the early Christians regarded the Founder's life, and the manner in which it is regarded in such works as Paley's *Evidences*, in which the truth of the doctrines of Christianity is made to rest on the historical evidence for miracle. In truth, at the time, the doctrines made their way by their own power.

<sup>1</sup> *Heb.* ix. 12.

## CHAPTER XIV

### STYLE IN THE EVANGELISTS

IN considering documents of the early years of our era we have to make allowance, not only for the popular tendencies of the time, but also for the influence of literary style. No one can read the proem of the Third Gospel without perceiving that the author was influenced by the literary traditions of his time. And the first verses of the Fourth Gospel show at once that the author had thought and written in the style of a particular school of philosophy. In this aspect it is not the want of education which influences or gives bias to the writer, but the power of an education in some ways imperfect. A modern reader, unless he has been specially educated, is very apt to overlook the presence of literary prepossession, of style, in an ancient writer. Yet it is certain that ancient literature, like ancient art, is entirely under the dominion of style. As Cicero has observed, Greeks cared less for what was said than for the way in which it was put. They cared for style more than for matter.

It is evidently impossible here to write an account of style in antiquity, or even of style as moulding the works of ancient historians. Such a work, if written with insight, would certainly be of extraordinary value.<sup>1</sup> To suppose that the ancient historians wished merely to give us an unvarnished narrative of fact, is to take the crudest view of them. It is exactly like supposing that Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* intended to let us know what really happened

<sup>1</sup> E. Norden's *Antike Kunstprosa* partially fills this place.

when his hero came back from Ilium; or like fancying that the sculptor of the Aphrodite of Melos merely wished to make a portrait of a handsome lady of his acquaintance. Every ancient historian has a purpose, which to some extent moulds his narrative. The tendency of the work of Herodotus is religious, that of Thucydides political, that of Xenophon didactic; while the writers of the school of Isocrates were altogether rhetorical in their tendency. The great writers introduced into the writing of history a number of fashions and conventions which dominated their feeble successors, and from which no educated person could wholly free his mind. In fact, as we come down to the silver age, the oratorical tendency dominates the writing of history more and more, until whole tracts of history are hidden from us by a thick veil of artificially woven words.

As an example of this domination of style, one may take the convention, prominent after Herodotus and Thucydides, of inserting speeches. When an ancient historian wished to indicate in an effective manner a historical position, he commonly did so by embodying it in a speech, which he placed in the mouth of one of his principal characters. It is only in a small minority of such instances, except perhaps in the case of Thucydides, that we have any reason to think that the character in question uttered any such speech as is ascribed to him. It is merely a well-understood conventional way of indicating how matters stood. And even when the report given us does represent more or less closely a speech actually made, at all events the arrangement and manner of the speech belong to the writer of the history, not to the speaker, since it was freely composed around a skeleton of recollected or traditional fact. Thus ancient history is full of the speeches of great men, few of which, even in substance, ever came from them. Not that there was any attempt at deception. It was a perfectly well recognised mark of a properly written history that the tale should be partly told by means of speeches. And this artifice persisted from ancient into modern days, and has only become extinct in comparatively modern times.

It may be desirable to adduce some evidence that ancient

historians thus composed their speeches. We will take as examples the greatest of Greek and the greatest of Roman historians, Thucydides and Tacitus.

One of the most important writers of early Roman history is Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek who lived at Rome in the reign of Augustus. As a historian himself he undertook the criticism of earlier historians, among others of Thucydides. The line which he takes in examining the speeches recorded by Thucydides surprises us. He treats these simply as the compositions of the historian, and not as the records of any actually spoken discourses. For example, speaking of the mission of the Plataean embassy to the Spartan king Archidamus, as given in the second book of Thucydides, Dionysius writes:<sup>1</sup> "The author sets forth such discourses as it was natural for the two parties to utter, suitable to the actors, and fitting the matter in hand, neither exceeding nor falling short of the mean. And he adorns them in chaste and clear and concise style." So again, speaking of the great speech which in the same book Thucydides puts in the mouth of Pericles, Dionysius writes: "I know not whether it would be allowed, that though all this was true, it was suitable to put in the mouth of Pericles, addressing Athenians in a state of exasperation. For the production of admirable sentiments and thoughts is in itself no matter for great admiration, unless they are suitable to the matter, and the actors and the circumstances, and so forth. But, as I said before, the historian, embodying his own view of the character of Pericles, seems to have moulded this speech unsuitably."

Dionysius speaks of the speeches in Thucydides as the mere composition of the historian, and criticises them as he would have criticised the speeches in a drama. Of course, in this he greatly overshoots the mark, and judges Thucydides unfairly. For no doubt in some cases, though the style is Thucydidean, the matter of the speeches comes from tradition more or less faithful.<sup>2</sup> But it is clear that in the time of Dionysius, that is, just at the beginning of the Christian era,

<sup>1</sup> *De Thucyd.* c. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See a paper by Prof. R. C. Jebb in *Hellenica*, where the question is very fairly argued; cf. Thucydides, i. 22.

the rhetorical had almost expelled the historic spirit. The notion that a historian ought not merely to make up suitable speeches, but record actual speeches, seems to have disappeared.

The speeches of Tacitus we can judge not merely from the statements of ancient critics, but on better evidence. We are able to compare a speech of the Emperor Claudius, given by the historian,<sup>1</sup> with an official record of the same speech engraved on bronze tablets which were found at Lyons in 1528. The purpose of the speech was to advocate the admission to the Senate of inhabitants of Gaul. The speech on the tablets is long, detailed, pedantic, and individual. The speech as given by Tacitus is brief, clear, and philosophic. It is no abridgment of the other, but quite an original composition. It is curious to read the comments of the modern editors of Tacitus. Brotier, who wrote in the last century, observes: "Any one who compares can see how Tacitus altered the speech of Claudius. Some blame Tacitus. But the speech of Claudius was old-fashioned, pedantic, not persuasive; therefore Tacitus had to compose something more suitable to the subject, the place, and the Imperial dignity." That is Brotier's notion of the right way of writing history. A more recent editor, Stahr, observes that Tacitus rewrote the speeches of the Emperors in the interests not of historic truth but of style, to suit the Roman taste of the day. We might even go further, and doubt whether Tacitus would be concerned to discover from the documents what Claudius had really said. He was quite content to set forth what Claudius should have said. We cannot in the least blame him for accepting what was the recognised literary convention of his day.

It cannot be doubted that the author of the Fourth Gospel has incorporated in his work some very valuable historical traditions. Whether these came from the Apostle John or from some other source is a very difficult question: strong arguments may be urged both for and against that view. But whencesoever these traditions came, they are in many instances to be preferred to those followed by the

<sup>1</sup> *Annal.* xi. 24.



Synoptists. In particular, the account of the Lord's Supper in the Fourth Gospel seems to me to be probably more correct than that given in the other gospels. And not only has the Evangelist good information as to some of the doings of his Master, but also the themes on which his speeches are based may in some cases come from the oral teaching of Jesus when on earth.<sup>1</sup> Not always can this be the case, but at least sometimes it seems likely. But that the discourses as they stand can ever have been uttered by Jesus could not be for a moment supposed by any person of critical judgment.

In these discourses we do find no doubt essentially Christian teaching. But it is evident, as all unprejudiced critics have seen, that in point of authenticity they are on quite a different level from the *logia* of the Synoptists. It may fairly be said that any one who supposed the Johannine discourses and the Sermon on the Mount to have been uttered by the same person would prove that he had absolutely no sense of literary style. Even conservative theologians in England<sup>2</sup> have been obliged to make the concession that the author of the Fourth Gospel redacts in his own style the sayings of his Master. It is, in fact, often quite impossible to tell at what point this writer intends the speech which he is reporting to end, and his own comments on it to begin. As an example we may take one of the most profound and suggestive passages in the whole Bible, the discourse to Nicodemus (*John* iii.). In the first place we may observe that according to the Evangelist only Nicodemus heard that discourse. Is it likely that he at once, in the manner of a modern interviewer, wrote it down to preserve it for publication? Some of the sayings of the discourse are so profound that we cannot easily believe them to come from any but Jesus. But the expansion of those sayings is absolutely in the manner of the Evangelist. And as we read on we find that at v. 13 the writer slips into the style of preaching or letter-writing, until at v. 18, with the words "he that believeth on him is not condemned," and the rest, we reach a turn at which the Evan-

<sup>1</sup> To this subject I shall return in future chapters, especially that on the "Crisis of Christianity."

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Westcott, for instance; see *Proceedings of the Church Congress in 1888*.



gelist has forgotten the occasion of his discourse, and is simply preaching in the synagogue. And the matter of the sermon is such as could not have come from the Jesus of the Synoptists.

A little further on in the same chapter we have a precisely parallel phenomenon. In v. 27 we find a discourse of John the Baptist beginning, "A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven." The statement here made by John, that he looked upon himself merely as a forerunner of a greater teacher, may come in substance from him; but the curiously philosophic and antithetic form of the speech belongs not to the Baptist, but to the Evangelist. And at v. 31, as in the previous case, the Evangelist has passed from the Baptist altogether, and is uttering one of his regular discourses. But he gives no sign of the transition: the reader has to be guided by the indications of style.

This is after all a tendency deep-seated in human nature. When a modern divine enters upon an extempore prayer of any considerable length, he is almost sure in some part of it to slip into an exhortation of his hearers. Nor is the greatest of dramatists quite free from a parallel disposition. The speech of Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*, which appeals to Shylock for mercy, soon passes into an eloquent commendation of mercy by the poet, who even forgets himself so far as to quote to Shylock the Lord's Prayer, an appeal curiously unsuited to a Jew.

Other discourses of the Fourth Gospel show the same tendency to slide into theological discourse. And not only the speeches of Jesus here reported, but even the miracles, have a certain air of being comments on a given text; the raising of Lazarns on the text "I am the Resurrection and the Life"; the feeding of the multitude on the text "Labour not for the meat which perisheth"; and so forth.

The writer of the Fourth Gospel was one of the greatest thinkers and theologians who ever lived. His mind was steeped in that mixture of Hebrew and Platonic thought which inspired the writings of Philo, and even of St. Paul. His thought, which was in essence Jewish, clothed itself in the terms of Hellenistic philosophy. Thus, though he is one of the great interpreters to the world of the spirit of Christianity,

we must not look to him for any faithful or objective account of the life of his Master. He interprets his Master as the Plato of the *Republic* and the *Theaetetus* interprets Socrates, save that Plato wrote much sooner after the death of Socrates than did the Fourth Evangelist after the death of Jesus.

This comparison is a very suggestive one, and might be worked out in considerable detail. For example, every reader of Plato must have noticed with admiration the skill with which the form of the dialogue is used to bring out the Socratic teaching. It is very unlikely that the keen-minded Greeks who talked with Socrates would have fallen so easily into all the dialectic traps which the cunning hand of the master provides. It is perfectly certain that no teacher could arrange beforehand the whole order of a dialogue with the precision and the literary skill which these written discussions exhibit. The opponents of Socrates are usually lay figures skilfully arranged as a foil to set forth the method and the teaching of the great philosopher.

We find phenomena closely parallel to these in the Johannine Gospel. The density of the Jews, and their persistency in falsely interpreting in material ways the spiritual teaching of Jesus, are utilised, sometimes almost with wearisome iteration, to place the spirituality of that teaching in the highest light. The vulgar materialism of such phrases as "Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?" or "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" is used with considerable literary skill to emphasise the wonderful paradoxes of which the Gospel is full. But beyond doubt this is little more than a trick of style. To suppose it a precise version of what really took place is to hold a very low opinion of the wonderful author of the Fourth Gospel. In fact, one of the phrases just cited is reported as having been uttered by the woman of Samaria when Jesus and she were alone. Whence could a writer of some sixty or eighty years later have learned the precise words which passed between them?

It is, however, clear that we cannot pursue this line of inquiry, which could only properly be followed in a special work. The Gospels are works of perfect candour, good sense,

and truth. They are inspired works, in the sense which I shall try to establish in the chapter on the *Inspiration of Scripture*. And this inspiration has kept them from extravagance, morbidity, and the faults which mark the Apocryphal Gospels. Yet, notwithstanding all this, they are, to use a Jewish expression, "Haggadah," or edifying religious narrative rather than history proper. We must maintain that the intellectual medium in which the Gospels were formed was of so powerful and distorting a kind that we cannot, without assuming a continuous series of miracles, suppose that they are to be trusted from an objective historical point of view, except in regard to parts of the teaching of the Founder. In saying this, we of course imply no kind of blame on the Evangelists. They worked according to the best lights of their time. It is not their fault that the way of regarding history has since changed. It is treating them most unfairly if we judge them by the canons of our own time, or expect them to conform to notions as to the writing of history which in their day were nowhere accepted.

But the fact remains that all attempts to extract objective history from works written in a spirit which is anything but that of objective history can have but limited success. Few things would interest us more than to learn the views of the Founder of Christianity as to his own death, whether he proclaimed his own second advent, how far he included Gentiles in his religious outlook, and the like. Yet these are questions which can never be finally solved. The best critics are here hopelessly at variance one with the other. And the reason is evident. In the recorded sayings of Jesus on these matters we can trace the dominance of certain ideas and beliefs. But whether these ideas and beliefs existed in the mind of Jesus himself, or whether they existed in the minds of the historians only, we cannot possibly say with certainty. We may form theories on the subject: we can scarcely help forming such theories: but to rise from theory to historic certainty is altogether beyond our powers. We are looking through two glasses at once, and cannot possibly be sure which is plain and which is coloured.

There are, however, certain directions in which historic

criticism enables us to move with more confident steps. The omissions of the Synoptists are perhaps as suggestive as their assertions. If we find no trace in the early traditions of the life of Jesus of certain views which figure prominently in the later books of the canon, we may with confidence assign these views to the period after the crucifixion. Again, many of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are so utterly foreign to his manner of speech as shown by the Synoptics that we can unhesitatingly reject them. When the Synoptics represent the teaching of their Master as different from that of the Christian society towards the end of the first century, we can almost implicitly believe them; it is when they represent it as identical with the teaching of the early Church that we must receive their testimony with caution. The reason is evident. If a custom existed in the Church, it would be almost certain to be reflected on the Founder's life; but where there was no such custom the powerful mythopœic tendency would not come in.

It is curious that no theory of the origin of the Gospels is so fatal to any attempt to affirm their objective authority as the view of the most conservative and orthodox critics, who maintain the Gospel of St. Mark to represent the testimony of Peter, and that of St. John the testimony of the Beloved Disciple. For if two intimate friends of our Lord who accompanied him throughout his career could hand down to posterity such utterly different portraitures of him, it is evident that there is no possibility of recovering his real traits. It is only by considering the Fourth Gospel as a highly idealised work that we can claim for the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels any historical reality whatever.

There are many Christian writers of other and more critical schools who would hold that our modern investigations have enabled us to discern the character, the methods, and the purposes of Jesus with clearness. They think that we are thus enabled to strip off the false accretions which soon grew round Christianity in the course of its early history, and to revert to the purity of the original doctrine, to quit the river and drink of the divine source as it wells pure and sweet out of the sacred soil of Palestine.

But it is certainly not true that a careful and erudite study of the origins of Christianity will bring all men alike into harmonious views as to the person and the work of Jesus. In fact, there is this difference between the progress of physical and the progress of historical science: that in the case of physical science men usually grow towards an agreement, but in the case of historical research they do not necessarily do so. Unless new authoritative documents come to light, historians seem to tend rather to wider divergence in opinion than to unity. Traditional views of history are vanishing on all sides, but in the place of them we get not new reasoned certainties, but a large variety of divergent views, which by no means tend to approximate one to the other. In the case of early Christian history this is notably the fact. Particular views as to the work and the purposes of Jesus have been put out of court, but there is an enormous variety of new views claiming to take their place. To take obvious instances, Renan introduced into the life of Jesus something of the French sentimentalist, the author of *Ecce Homo* something of the English philanthropist. Perhaps the strangest development is among the newest. In the recent biography which is called *Pastor Pastorum*, Jesus appears with traits of the idealised schoolmaster, with a likeness to Dr. Arnold. Each writer moulds the image of the Master after the character which he most admires; and there is none who cannot claim some justification in the vague traits which come before us in the Gospels.

It is true that historic research gives us constantly fuller knowledge of the state of society amid which Christianity arose, and of the forces with which it had to deal. So we may more fully understand the bearings of many of the actions of our Lord, and may better comprehend those phases of his character in which he appears as the child of his age, modified by its surroundings and inspired by its ideals. But these investigations throw no light on that which is most essential, that in which Jesus was really original. It is easy to explain a life or a character if one omits all that is hardest to account for in it. The background is growing clearer and more detailed, the robes of the great Master are forming themselves in brighter colour and shape; but his face, his reality cannot be



thus made out. An able writer who has done much to inform us as to the Jewish setting of the Master's life disclaims any pretence to write a life of Christ, on the ground that "the materials for it do not exist."<sup>1</sup> This statement is true in a much wider sense than this writer intends, nor do I think that it would be disputed by any one who understands the nature of historic evidence.

As regards the events of the life of Jesus, the modern spirit rejects the miraculous element. As regards the teaching of Jesus, though its general character may be clearly made out, many parts of it remain obscure. The first requisite to an objective and scientific biography of the Founder of Christianity is the chronological arrangement of his utterances, so that the development of his thought may be traced. But the Evangelists are regardless of dates. And modern historians, working on the data they give, have succeeded very imperfectly in tracing the action of time on the Master's life. Until historians have advanced far beyond these preliminary difficulties, an objective life of Jesus is out of the question.

A recent and judicious attempt to divide the life of Jesus into periods is that of Prof. Sanday in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. Its weak point lies in the difficulty of bringing into one focus the chronology of the Synoptists and that of John. A more detailed, though less judicial, attempt in the same direction is made in the life of Jesus in Hausrath's work, perhaps the most vivid of the lives of Jesus which come from authors who can stand the stress of modern criticism. He makes the background of the life of Jesus clear, and the personality in the foreground seems sometimes to stand forth luminously. Whole days of the life of the Master are restored with some degree of probability. And yet the person whom the writer brings before us is in many ways enigmatical and impossible. The fact is that in the reconstruction of the life of the Master, every worthy and duly educated writer makes some interesting and valuable contributions. But no bucket exhausts the well. Perhaps centuries hence new lives of Jesus will be appearing, still adding to our

<sup>1</sup> Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus*, Preface.



knowledge of the Master, and still finding new depths of meaning in his teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it seems to me unquestionable that whatever gain science and intellect may have made by the progress of criticism, that progress has not enabled us, and probably never will enable us, to set forth the purposes and character of our Master in an objective light as a part of ascertained history. Our views in regard to him must always have a strong subjective and individual tinge: and however well satisfied we may be that our views in the matter are true, we can scarcely hope that they will seem equally true to others. Thus for all future time we must content ourselves with mere probability in place of the old fancied certainty, when we quote words as spoken by him or deeds as done by him.

There is an opinion commonly current in England, especially among the clergy, that recent investigation, and especially the discovery of very early Christian documents, has caused greater value to attach to the Synoptic Gospels as literal history. Certainly the progress of learning has taken back the dates of these Gospels, and rendered untenable some of the speculative German constructions which referred them to the second century.<sup>2</sup> But the gain which thus accrues to their historic credibility is infinitesimal. Indeed, the further back the Fourth Gospel is carried, the greater becomes the difficulty of constructing an actual life, such as can possibly have given rise both to it and to the Synoptic Gospels. The question is not one of date of origin of the Gospels, but of the method of their construction, the kind of minds which evolved them, the purposes they were intended to serve.

The recent discovery of the so-called Gospel of Peter does certainly show that our four Gospels were, in the latter part of the second century, regarded by Christians as all of equal authority, and used freely as materials for the construction of fresh versions of the life of Jesus better adapted to the tenets of various sects of heretics. Conservative critics think that all this adds to the credibility of our Gospels;

<sup>1</sup> In a note to this chapter I briefly criticise the latest, and in some ways the best, of the lives of Jesus, M. Réville's.

<sup>2</sup> On this point nearly all the great critics of the time are agreed.

but impartial consideration soon shows that the very reverse is the case.

It clearly appears that in the second century Gospels were valued not as narratives of facts, but as props of doctrines. The Bishop Serapion, who condemned the Gospel of Peter, did so, not because it distorted fact, but because it promulgated heresy. This was evidently the tone of mind at the time. And the authority who would condemn the Gospel of Peter on the ground of its unorthodoxy would probably accept the Gospel of John if he approved its teaching. That is to say, testimony as to the life of Christ was accepted or rejected not on historical but on theological grounds. This is precisely the contention of the critical school. And this view could scarcely be more concisely expressed than in the phrase of Dr. Westcott,<sup>1</sup> "The Gospels were the results and not the foundation of the Apostolic preaching."

The line of thought which we have been pursuing seems to show that it is a *petitio principii* to base doctrine on supposed historic fact: at all events on the history contained in our sacred writings. For history as we have it in the New Testament, evangelic history, is to a large extent erected on a basis of prophecy and doctrine. How can that which is based upon doctrine support doctrine? If the elephant rests on the tortoise, how can the tortoise rest on the elephant?

It must not be forgotten that in the last two chapters we are treating the early historic documents of Christianity from the purely objective or historical standpoint. It is not to be expected that Christians, with their intense interest in the life of their Master, will be able to keep their beliefs as to that life within the narrow bounds of objective history. Faith and imagination will outrun intellect; and every individual will have a conception of his Master's life which will be based in a great degree on his own spiritual experience. This is inevitable, and it is quite defensible. The views of individuals must, however, be tested by the canons of criticism current in modern schools of thought. And unless they endure the test, however suitable to the individual conscience, they are not able to survive. All then that our critical investigation attempts is

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, 1860, p. 154.

to furnish some sort of standard to curb the license of unfounded historic speculation.

## NOTE I

### M. ALBERT RÉVILLE'S *JÉSUS DE NAZARETH*

Since the preceding chapters were written I have read the powerful and valuable work on the life of Jesus by M. Albert Réville.<sup>1</sup> This book has made me alter my text in a few passages ; but it seems well to add a short note incorporating some of the reflections to which the reading of it has led.

It seems to me that of all the lives of Jesus which I have seen that of M. Réville is the most historic in method and the most judicial in tone. It is a work at once thoroughly critical and partly appreciative, and it clearly shows how far historic science can, under existing conditions, be expected to go in establishing an objective life of Jesus. M. Réville's successes and failures are alike suggestive.

As I have above remarked, it is far easier to recover the teaching than the life of Jesus. M. Réville's account of the teaching, while worthy of a most careful reading, does not call for special remark in this place. There is more to be said in regard to his reconstruction of the life of Jesus. Excellent as are the method and the abilities of M. Réville, he does not seem to arrive at results sufficiently certain to invalidate the view that the life of the Master is not, in an objective sense, recoverable, beyond a certain point.

Let us take a concrete example. We find in the Synoptic Gospels an account of the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the same Evangelists who report to us the precise words used by Jesus in his final appeal to the Father in Heaven tell us at the same time that he was not with his disciples, but at some distance from them (Luke says, a stone's cast), and that the disciples were heavy with sleep. It seems quite clear then that the words and deeds of Jesus at this crisis cannot be determined by any evidence which historic criticism can recognise. But M. Réville accepts as historic the account given (with considerable variations) by the Synoptic writers. He allows that the testimony of the Apostles could be under the circumstances of but little value ; but he thinks that our account may come from another witness, the young man mentioned in Mark,<sup>2</sup> "Toute cette scène de Gethsémané avait eu un témoin ignoré, un tout jeune homme, un νεανίσκος, qui

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus de Nazareth* : Paris, 1897.

<sup>2</sup> xiv. 51, "A certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him," etc.

probablement passait la nuit dans le pressoir voisin." Of course this is a legitimate theory, but it conveys no conviction: it is far more probable that the whole scene was moulded by the Christian consciousness of the first believers. Doubtful as is the evidence of the sleeping Apostles, that of this unknown youth is even less admissible in the court of history.

There is a similar difficulty in regard to our accounts of the crucifixion, and M. Réville meets it in much the same way. It is well known that the various accounts of the last hours of Jesus on the cross are conflicting. And this is very natural. The Apostles and the Galilean disciples were dispersed and in hiding. We are told by the Synoptists that some Galilean women looked on, but it was from afar. It is even likely that no Christian witness stood near the cross.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the disciples would afterwards talk with many of the Jews who were present; but they would regard their testimony with suspicion, and accept or reject it according to preconceived views. Hence it is quite natural that the facts of the crucifixion should be beyond recovery. But M. Réville is scarcely justified in trusting, as a witness, Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross: "C'est peut-être à lui que nous devons le peu de renseignements que nous possédons sur les dernières heures du grand crucifié." This clue seems to be a very untrustworthy indication to follow in the darkness.

It must not be supposed that all, or most, of M. Réville's reconstructions are made of faulty material. Thoroughly trained in historic method, sober and impartial in judgment, he usually adheres as closely as possible to the best established facts. Even when, as in discussing the Resurrection, he advances views which will be extremely repugnant to most Christians, he moves strictly within the bounds of his craft. Yet the sober and regulated methods which he uses seem sometimes out of place when applied to a time so full of prodigies as that of Jesus, and to writings so full alike of subjectivity and of inspiration as the Synoptic Gospels. Legitimate as are his theories as to the course of the career of Jesus, his purposes and actions, it does not seem likely that they will be lastingly accepted more than those of his predecessors. In dealing with the teaching of Jesus, we are on quite another level; and here M. Réville is often quite admirable.

Of late years an immense deal has been done in the historic criticism of Herodotus. But if we carefully observe the results of that criticism we shall find that, though much is called in question, very few new views are established except by the discovery of new

<sup>1</sup> The statement of the Fourth Evangelist that the mother of Jesus, with other women and John, stood by the cross cannot be regarded as definitely historic (*Jésus de Nazareth*, ii. 103).

documents. In the case of the Gospel history important new documents as yet are not forthcoming, though the success of Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt makes us think their discovery possible. Criticism, however able and methodical, seldom succeeds in making an acceptable narrative. It rejects much, and with reason; but it establishes little. Its function is rather educative than constructive.

## NOTE II

### M. PAUL SABATIER'S *VIE DE S. FRANÇOIS*

Among all the great Christians who have embodied one side or another of the life of their Master, none comes nearer to him in essential features than Francis of Assisi. He was like the Founder of Christianity in his gentle spirit, his boundless love for men, his joyful acceptance of poverty and self-denial. He was fond of appealing, like Jesus, to the facts of the visible world, and in hearty sympathy with life in all its forms. And he founded, like Jesus, a society which grew and spread with marvellous rapidity after his death. Of course, at every point, moral and intellectual, Francis stands on an incomparably lower level: he is the imitator, while Jesus is the leader.

M. Paul Sabatier's *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* is a work at once appreciative and critical. It is an endeavour to penetrate through partisan bias and pious exaggeration to the real Francis. It is followed by a careful and lucid survey of the materials for the preceding biography.

The result is to exhibit in a clear light the fashion in which the life-history of a great and inspired teacher takes form. We can see a parallel to the formation of the Gospels, and trace with eyes less dazzled by inherited bias and keen religious feeling the same forces at work in the development of the life of the disciple as in the life of the Master. It is noteworthy that the extant lives of Francis are closer to being contemporary documents and the testimony of eye-witnesses than are the Gospels. Francis belongs to a time far nearer to us and more within the sweep of our instruments of observation. Yet the element of subjectivity in all the written accounts of his life is extraordinary, and able authorities differ in regard to the most notable points in it. There are unsettled disputes as to the authenticity of his will, the reality of the *stigmata*, and the character and bearing of some of the most prominent of his companions. We have several works written by Francis himself, and so cannot doubt as to the character of his teaching. The general course of his life, occupied in wandering in



Italy and beyond, in preaching poverty and happiness, is clear. But almost all beyond the general plan is involved in a mist of miracle and marvel.

Francis died in 1226. Almost immediately was published that charming record of his life called *Speculum Perfectionis*<sup>1</sup> by Brother Leo. This work, like the Gospel of Mark, is a series of detached sayings, with a background of incident, and reflecting a nature of rare beauty. The only miracles spoken of in it are the healing of diseases, victories over Satan and the like. In the first few chapters we feel the breath of controversy, and perceive that Brother Leo was at variance with his brethren as to the interpretation of the wishes of Francis; but most of the work is pure and limpid, and we have to make but moderate allowance for the "personal equation" of the writer. Three or four years later appeared a biography written by Thomas of Celano. He was appointed to the task by Pope Gregory IX., had known Francis personally, and could consult all the latter's most intimate friends. Yet within fifteen years Thomas of Celano's first legend had become impossible. The prominence there given to Elias (the vicar of the order) was almost a scandal. The necessity of working it over and completing it became clearly evident at the chapter of Genoa (1244).<sup>2</sup>

One of the lives produced by this rising demand was that of the three Companions of Francis, which was written in 1246. It is a lovely work, full of charming anecdote, and curiously free from the miraculous element. But as it has come down to us it is very incomplete, and its bias is obvious. "It is at least as much a panegyric of poverty as a history of St. Francis." Soon after, Celano brought out a second and revised edition of his biography. This work is described by M. Sabatier as in every page reflecting the contemporary history of the order. The events of the life of Francis have taken a didactic form and become comments on his rule. History has become the vehicle of certain practical purposes.

In 1263 was completed the life by St. Bonaventura, who wrote as minister-general of the order, and in the first instance for edification. By this time, only thirty-seven years after the death of Francis, his story had become laden with a multitude of miracles, but the character of the founder had begun to fade away. M. Sabatier writes:<sup>3</sup> "While in Celano there are the large lines of a soul's history, a sketch of the affecting drama of a man who attains to the conquest of himself, with Bonaventura all this interior action disappears before divine interventions." "We see that St.

<sup>1</sup> Put together and edited by M. Paul Sabatier in 1898; translated into English by Mr. Sebastian Evans.

<sup>2</sup> Sabatier. Sixth edition, p. lx. Eng. trans. p. 373.

<sup>3</sup> P. lxxxvii. Trans. p. 397.

Francis was a saint, a very great saint, since he performed an innumerable quantity of miracles, great and small ; but we feel very much as if we had been going through a shop of objects of piety." So well pleased was Bonaventura with his own biography that he made a strenuous effort to destroy all others ; though fortunately his success in this endeavour was very incomplete.

Certain of the early historians of the Franciscan order deal with the biography of its Founder. M. Sabatier finds the chronicle of Clareno, written about 1330, very interesting as preserving to us much of the flavour of the early life of the Friars. "Clareno<sup>1</sup> and his friends not only adhered to the general belief of the order that Francis had been a great saint, but to this conviction they added the persuasion that the work of the Stigmatised could only be continued by men who should attain to his moral stature, to which men might arrive through the power of faith and love."

Finally, we have that beautiful work, the *Fioretti* of St. Francis, written by 1385.<sup>2</sup> Here we have a work of literary rather than of historic value, to which it is hopeless to apply the methods of critical history. "Yet<sup>3</sup> that which gives these stories an inestimable worth is what for want of a better term we may call their atmosphere. They are legendary, transformed, exaggerated, false even if you please, but they give us with a vivacity and intensity of colouring something that we shall search for in vain elsewhere, the surroundings amid which St. Francis lived."

Such is a bare record of a process which lasted 160 years, whereby a human life was gradually idealised, and the events of a life-history used as material to be shaped into the construction of an order, or the erection of a body of teaching. It would be possible to compare it stage by stage with the development of the Christian history. The Gospels belong to a far more advanced stage of idealised biography than the life by Celano and the chronicles of the Three Companions. Yet the comparison might help us to see how necessarily the practical needs, the affections, and the hopes of men must always interfere to distort the sober records of history, in the case of all those who have greatly moved mankind. We are fairly well acquainted with the teaching of Francis. We reject his alleged miracles, and regard parts of his life as so far overlaid with legend and fancy as scarcely to be recoverable by sober history. Our verdict must be the same in the case of Jesus ; though, as we have none of his writings, and no biography for some forty years after his death, we are in a far worse position historically than in the case of Francis.

<sup>1</sup> Sabatier, p. ciii. Trans. p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Translated in the *Temple Classics* by Mr. T. Arnold.

<sup>3</sup> Sabatier, p. cviii. Trans. p. 416.

## CHAPTER XV

### JESUS AS MESSIAH

It appears, as will be shown in later chapters, that most of the ideas of mature Christianity existed, at least in rudimentary form, before the Christian era. And after the Christian era they developed usually on lines more or less divergent from the teaching of Jesus himself. Does it not then seem that a small place is left in Christianity for the historic Founder? It is evident that we are approaching a point at which we must move with caution.

It is certain that the natural and inevitable tendency of historic criticism is to depreciate the influence exerted by personalities on movements. There is nothing so unacceptable to science as a break in the line of development. Probably one of these days some writer who is over-educated in the methods of science will succeed in writing a history of Christianity wherein the Founder is almost omitted. And to many readers such a work will probably appear to be the crown of historic research. But here, as in most things, the middle course is the safe course. The extreme tendencies of criticism are almost as likely to lead us into error as is the want of a critical spirit. We must refuse to follow them blindly.

In fact, the whole of early Christianity was steeped in the personality of Jesus. No doctrine was taken into the fabric of the faith until it had been baptized into Christ, marked with the cross of the suffering and cleansed with the saving blood of the Founder. Doctrines, like the early Christians themselves, were buried with Christ, in order that they might rise

like him into newness of life. It is truths such as these which an over-critical spirit is apt to overlook, yet which are really of unmeasured importance. It is the glory and the strength of Christianity to be able to point to a historic origin, and to have ever open to it the appeal to the Founder. In some ages of the Church, notably in the age of the Gnostics, and when the Arian controversy was raging, there has appeared a great danger that Christian belief might float loose of its historic moorings and wander vaguely amid the currents of an endless sea of doctrine. On the other hand, all the glorious fruits of the Reformation sprang from a reversion to the records of the origin of Christianity. If there were laid on us the necessity of choosing between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Christian doctrine, the choice would be by no means easy. But we are not compelled to surrender either the one or the other. We are compelled, especially in Protestant countries, to re-survey the origins of the Christian religion. And sound criticism does undoubtedly compel all of us to give up much that we would perhaps have wished to retain in regard to the Jesus of history. But there is much left which historic criticism will always be unable to touch. If there appears to be in the recorded doings and sufferings of the Founder a good deal of ethical construction, we may, on the other hand, feel with an exhilarating confidence that at all events we possess main points of his teaching drawn in broad and clear lines. The profound originality of Christianity remains, though it is not so independent as has hitherto commonly been supposed of pre-existing material. It shows its originality rather by the power of absorbing and transforming than by making quite a new departure.

From the moment of the death of Jesus, theologians have been so busy in idealising and exalting him, in spreading about him mists through which he looks more and more gigantic, and less and less clear, that it is extremely hard for history to resume her rights. And it is quite impossible that she should even try to resume them without appearing irreverent and iconoclastic, without chilling the fervour of the enthusiastic, and disturbing the faith of the pious. Only of this we may be quite sure, that there is no phase of the history of the past

which the new scientific spirit will leave unattempted. If reverence and faith are to persist, they must meet the full shock of historic investigation and become acclimatised to it.

Almost all thinkers are agreed that Jesus was an unique religious genius. Those who believe in the possibility of the inspiration of man by God will allow that he was inspired in a higher and fuller sense than even the greatest of his followers. It is of the nature of inspiration that the higher and fuller it becomes the deeper it penetrates, beneath what is accidental and peculiar in him who is inspired, to the profound depths of common human nature. The really inspired man speaks not only to his countrymen and contemporaries, but to men of all nations and all time.

Nevertheless, history has continuity; and every man as seen in history has a place in that continuity. He belongs to a definite race, and speaks a particular language; and not only this, but the intellectual and moral forms taken by his life and teaching are derived from the age and race in which he appears. Religious genius, like other genius, is shown not by taking an entirely new departure, but by raising to a higher level existing beliefs and institutions, by turning all that it touches to gold.

Thus for any historic criticism of the teaching of Jesus, a careful preparation is necessary. We have to make up our minds, first in regard to the psychology of inspiration and the religious life; and second, as to the surroundings, mental and physical, amid which the life of Jesus was spent. We thus acquire a defined point of view, and call in the aid of the historic imagination to discern the figure of the Master working according to laws partly known, and seen against a background discovered by study.

For any complete reconstruction of the teaching of Jesus, the first necessity, as we have already observed, would be to arrange our accounts of it in chronological sequence. It may be doubted how far this is possible with the existing material. The task has been recently attempted by many able writers: Wendt, Réville, Estlin Carpenter, and a host of others. But it cannot be said to be accomplished with any finality. We may perhaps distinguish two periods in the Master's life: first, a time of joyous serenity and unclouded hope; and second,



a time when a temporary failure of his mission, culminating in his own death, dwelt before his eyes. But yet it is scarcely possible to separate the teaching of the earlier from that of the later period. And the main principles of it appear to be the same throughout. I shall therefore confine myself to an attempt to portray in bold outlines what I conceive to have been the general character of the teaching, as it appears alike in the *logia* incorporated in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Parables, and in the dispersed sayings recorded in the Gospels. The Fourth Gospel does not come in. Nor can we venture to press the testimony with regard to the last days at Jerusalem, about which there soon gathered so much accretion. But the general character of the teaching of the Prophet of Galilee is not beyond recovery.

In case of a large part of the sayings of Jesus as recorded by the Synoptic writers, doubts of their genuineness can hardly be justified. These short and pregnant sentences were probably often repeated by the Master; they were very easy to remember, and they probably became in the lifetime of Jesus part of the mental furniture of his Apostles. To suppose that they were invented is to suppose that there was among the companions of Jesus a greater and more original religious genius than himself. They have all the air of being what they profess to be: the utterances of a great and inspiring teacher, spiritual views of a new Jewish and yet cosmopolitan kind, appropriate to the time and place. No doubt this is a subjective, and therefore a dangerous, criterion. Nevertheless, we venture to say that any person of trained literary judgment who begins by making himself thoroughly familiar with the best attested and least doubtful sayings of Jesus will soon find that they have a flavour which is all their own, and will soon lay aside any doubts with which he may have started as to their being the utterances of an unique historic personality. Of course, the recorded sayings of Jesus, even in the Synoptic Gospels, include many interpolations, and much that has been misunderstood and misreported. And on the other hand it may be that some of the sayings of Jesus, especially in the version of Matthew, may have grown in the inspired experience of the early disciples in breadth and in spirituality, so that what was

uttered to meet a particular occasion developed in the consciousness of the community into a broad statement of religious truth. But there is certainly a historic nucleus, even if the nucleus is surrounded by much that is doubtful and uncertain.

If we endeavour steadily to purge our minds of the prepossessions which arise from the later history and the practical working of the Christian faith, and to realise vividly the conditions which existed in Judæa in the first century, we can scarcely fail to see that there is one question which to the followers and the contemporaries of Jesus completely overshadowed all others. People did not ask whether Jesus was of one substance with the Father; they did not ask whether the religion which he taught was absolute or not; they did not discuss the nature of a saving faith in him. The question which agitated them was this, Was he or was he not the Messiah? His friends proclaimed him as such; he himself accepted the claim; his enemies put him to death because of it. This is the essential fact of the whole history.

Jesus appearing in history as a Jew, born in Galilee<sup>1</sup> in the reign of Cæsar Augustus, his life and his teaching cannot possibly be understood, save in relation to such a background. And history shows that, at the time, the religious life of the Jews centred mainly in the expectation of a coming deliverer. Suetonius speaks of a widespread feeling in Syria that a great conqueror was about to arise there. And the Jewish history during the first century of our era is coloured by the rise and the suppression of pretenders to the Messiahship, or at least to prophetic inspiration.

It was, humanly speaking, impossible that one who at that moment came forward as a teacher sent from God, with the consciousness of a great mission, should fail to put to himself the question whether he was the promised Messiah. All writers, probably, are agreed that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah; but many writers think that he did so only in the latter part of his career. The passage in *Matthew*,<sup>2</sup> in which Jesus speaks in warm praise of Peter for first realising that he was the Messiah, is especially relied on by

<sup>1</sup> The story of the birth at Bethlehem is without historic probability. See Chapter XIX.

<sup>2</sup> xvi. 17.

these writers. It is, however, clear, from many Synoptic passages, that Jesus was very anxious that his claim to the dignity should not be openly spoken of. Wendt thinks that Jesus from his baptism had learned to think of himself as the Messiah, but for good reasons was anxious to remain for a time unknown in that light. Historically, the question can scarcely be solved. Even the Synoptic Gospels have little claim to chronological sequence of events and words. We only know that sooner or later Jesus not only regarded himself as the Messiah, but was also willing to be regarded as such by his disciples, and even strangers. The facts are less obscure as to the light in which Jesus regarded his own Messiahship, when he did lay claim to it. The nature of his inspiration forbade him to regard the Messianic office in the narrow and national manner of those about him. Turning from what was outward to what was inward, as he always did, he saw that the function of the true Messiah must be, not to overthrow the Roman dominion and establish a new empire in its place, but to turn the heart of Israel to God, to bring in a state of society in which the will of God should be done in earth as in heaven. And since Jesus felt that precisely this was the mission on which he himself was sent into the world, he could scarcely fail to see that his claim to the Messianic office was clear.

It has been seen by critical historians that it was towards the end of the career of Jesus that he more clearly perceived that the path to the realisation of this mission must lie through suffering and death, such as the later Isaiah speaks of as the portion of the chosen servant of God. In spite of the warnings which, according to our authorities, Jesus gave to his disciples, it does not appear that even up to the day of the crucifixion they were able to lay aside their belief in the outward and visible triumph of their Master. And when the actual events had shattered that hope, and it became evident that their Messiah was born to suffer, they began to look for his speedy return in the clouds of heaven, to judge mankind and to set up on earth the reign of the saints.

At this point we reach a great historical difficulty. The life of Jesus as recorded in our Gospels was, as above shown,

in a great degree constructed out of Messianic prophecy: in particular the Isaian utterances. In this case how is it possible to discriminate between actual deeds and words of Jesus in the line of the Isaian prophecies, and deeds and words attributed to Jesus because they were in that line, which nevertheless really came from the Christian consciousness? This difficulty is, strictly speaking, insurmountable. Yet it would be an excessive scepticism which would deny that the actual life of Jesus was in its general character consonant with the sublime poetry of Isaiah: a scepticism which would suppose that effects happened without causes, and that the disciples of Jesus were more original and more spiritual than their master. We must in all reason suppose that the master set the example which the disciples followed.

The keynote of the whole ministry of Jesus is given in that passage of the Third Gospel<sup>1</sup> in which Jesus, in the synagogue of his native Nazareth, is represented as setting forth the nature of his mission. After reading one of the most striking and characteristic passages of the Isaian prophecy, beginning "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," Jesus went on to say, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." He is said to have thus claimed a divine mission, and at the same time proclaimed in what sense he interpreted the call. In the Third Gospel this discourse is rightly or wrongly represented as having taken place at the beginning of the career of Jesus, soon after his baptism and temptation. Perhaps of all his recorded utterances it is the most suggestive. He thus proclaimed that he came not to found a kingdom but to establish a society, to turn from outward success to triumph in the hearts of men, to aim at no victory of his own will among the nations, but at a life of doing and suffering the will of God.

The same note is sounded in a very characteristic part of the First and Third Gospels, the narrative of the temptation. This narrative, if authentic, must be based upon an account given by Jesus himself to his disciples, though whether it was meant as a parable we cannot be sure. Here again we have the

<sup>1</sup> *Luke* iv. 16-22.

deliberate turning from what is without to what is within, from visible marvel and wide sway of nations to following God in conduct and trusting his word. And in the Fourth Gospel, where the author works with much freer hand, a point which he tries to make clear by constant repetition is the contrast between the interpretation of Messianic prophecy admitted by the Jews, and even by the twelve disciples, and that which was accepted by Jesus himself.

Jesus was surrounded by Jews only. And it is impossible that anything can have so completely dominated the thought of all about him as did the doubt, the hope, the belief that in him appeared the promised leader sent by God to put on a new level the life of the despised and persecuted Jewish race. The author of the Fourth Gospel is constantly insisting, with almost wearisome iteration, on the fact that the disciples of Jesus were very far from understanding their Lord. Thus we cannot venture to say that we know at all fully to what extent Jesus shared the opinions of those about him. But it is of the essence of great genius to penetrate beneath the local and temporary to the eternal human basis. Sophocles wrote for the Athenians, but his works belong to us all. Shakespeare thought of his contemporaries, but his plays appeal as much to modern Germans and Russians as they did to the English of the time of Elizabeth. In the same way, whether or not Jesus was consciously addressing future ages and distant countries, he penetrated so deeply beneath the surface of contemporary life and feeling that he reached the permanent and eternal in men whether of his own time or any other. His words, if primarily addressed to Jewish ears, were really directed to all in all ages who are capable of being inspired by the love of goodness.

One of the most notable points in the Synoptic discourses is the way in which Jesus accepts the severe monotheism of the Jews, and yet transforms it by his genius, not indeed in the least in the direction of the modified Tritheism which became dominant in the Christian Church, but in the direction in which it had been actually moving among the Jews during their history. During the Babylonian Captivity, and in the ages which followed, the Jewish people gradually realised a



conception of God which was far nobler than that of the Greeks or of any ancient nation, and which is the great and lasting gift of Israel to the world. They attained it not merely by the intellect, but by an inspiration which fused the powers of heart and will. Their religion was not one of mere acquiescence in the divine order, but of passionate longing for a nearer approach to God. In the Psalms we find the noblest exposition of this high and divine enthusiasm. And the language of the Psalms has been down to this day perhaps the readiest vehicle for the longings and aspirations of the souls to whom God was the object of earnest love and passionate adoration. In all pre-Christian literature they stand alone in the religious aspect.

From the Synoptic Gospels it would seem that the Founder of Christianity lived largely in the atmosphere of the Psalms, and constantly found in their language an outlet for the divine passion which filled him. But his unique inspiration led him even beyond the power of expression which is found in the Psalmists. His conception of God was loftier, more tender, more human than even that of the poets of Israel. There is one phrase in particular which seems to have been constantly in his mouth, "Your, or my, father in heaven." Dwelling on this phrase in constant discourse, and living in it, Jesus raised to another level even the highest Jewish idea of God. He taught a faith in God which is essentially a "feeling of sonship," a confidence that man may approach his Maker, not without awe, but without fear; that he may move forward in life with bold and confident steps, feeling sure that all he meets will be of divine ordination, that nothing which he meets will be unforeseen by God, or really harmful.

This was undoubtedly one of the most fundamental parts of the earthly teaching of the Founder of Christianity. And it was of the greatest novelty in the history of the world, in spite of the noble approaches towards it which may be found alike in the Hebrew Psalms, and in the highest Pagan writings, such as the Hymn of Cleanthes. For Jesus not merely gave the teaching forth, but he embodied it in his life, and brought it down to the level of the most ordinary persons. Starting, apparently, not from the views of any school of Scribes,

but from the facts of the world about us and the deepest truths of human consciousness, he laid down the plan of a religion based on love between God and man, and fitted for acceptance by the whole human race.

No greater doctrine than that of the divine fatherhood has ever been preached among men. Yet it is liable, like all great doctrines, to perversion and to caricature. The fact is that it cannot be understood save where a high and stern view of the parental relation is accepted. The father in the mind of Jesus is a father who thinks more of goodness than of happiness, who will make no terms with neglect or ingratitude, who does not hesitate to chastise. The modern Christian often tries to think of God as like a weak and indulgent parent, who shields his child from all the discipline of life, and encourages him to do his own will. And the difference between the Master's view and that of the degenerate disciple is that the former may by faith be reconciled with the course of life and with experience, while the latter cannot, but must in the long-run break down in practice, giving way to discontent, irreligion, misery, and despair. Even the parable of the Prodigal Son, though it goes to the verge of unreality, does not cross that verge.

The close relationship between God and man found, for the disciples of Jesus, and probably for Jesus himself, its best basis in the consciousness of the Master himself. With him the sense of sonship was abiding and fundamental; and hence it was possible for his disciples through him to attain to it. That which was revealed to him for the first time in history became a possession of his followers and of his Church through all time. This truth is perhaps more completely realised and more fully set forth in the Fourth Gospel than in the more historical Synoptic writers.

The relation of man to man was in the teaching of Jesus based upon the relation of man to God. His humanism was of an intensely religious cast. Of course a feeling of the sacredness of a common humanity was by no means new to the world. Even the intense narrow patriotism of the Jews had in some degree given way at various times to a desire that all nations should share the blessing of Israel. But it was the Stoics in particular who had spread in select circles the idea

of a sacred tie binding man to man, and of the dignity of the life partaken of by men. But the "enthusiasm of humanity" which Jesus bequeathed to his followers was something very different from this. The slave who was a philosopher could rise to the highest human dignity. But how few slaves were philosophers. And for the mass a place of inferiority and of contempt was quite suitable. Through the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, in spite of his studied modesty, there breathes a spirit of moral and intellectual scorn. But though philosophy is out of the reach of the many, closeness to God, and an intimate dependence on his will, is within the reach of the humblest, is indeed more common among the poor and the uneducated than in higher circles. This kinship to God was in the Christian view the central fact of human nature, and in the light of it all human nature was translated and glorified. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," is the very secret of the Christian love for man, which, when once planted by the Founder, never wholly died down in the Church. In all ages there have been Christians who have nursed the leper, shared the shame of the outcast, boldly welcomed torture and death, not out of a mere love for man, but out of passion for the divine element in man.

In modern days the schools of secularity have tried to raise the mere desire to promote the happiness of one's neighbour into the position of the mainspring of virtue. But have they succeeded as Jesus succeeded with his teaching of love for man arising out of love for God?

There is a remarkable phrase, which Jesus seems to have applied frequently to himself, the phrase "son of man." As it is quite out of the line of thought of early Christians, it seems almost certain that the use belongs to the Master himself. It is a phrase familiar to readers of the Old Testament. Ezekiel is frequently addressed by the Lord as "son of man" when messages are given him for Israel. In Psalms viii. and cxliv., "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" the phrases "man" and "son of man" are clearly of identical meaning. But in *Daniel* (vii. 13) we read of one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And it appears that from this collocation the phrase

"son of man" gained some Messianic interpretation, and was generally so understood by the Jews of the first century.

If Jesus had spoken of himself merely as "a son of man," we might have supposed that he was claiming to stand like Ezekiel as a prophet, or to have adopted in extreme modesty the language of the Psalms. But the phrase which he commonly uses, "*the* son of man," may perhaps have another meaning. It may show that he claimed in some way to represent the human race.

Jesus is quoted by the Synoptists as speaking of himself as the son of man when he puts forth special claims, as to be Lord of the Sabbath, or to be judge of mankind. The humble sound of the title contrasts strangely with the exalted functions claimed for its owner.

These passages may be divided into two classes. In the first class we may place the passages of an apocalyptic character, in which Jesus is represented as coming in the clouds of heaven as judge of mankind. Of these passages we speak more at length in another chapter. They cannot fairly be taken as strictly authentic. And here the passage in *Daniel* would naturally serve to mould the phrases in which the Master was spoken of. In the second class we must place several very remarkable phrases in which Jesus claims as the son of man high prerogative, to be lord of the Sabbath, and to have the power to forgive sins. It is not unnatural that ordinary readers should regard these passages as proofs of what they would call the "divinity of Jesus." But to read the passages thus is to invert their meaning. For it is not as the embodiment of God, but as the representative of man, that Jesus in these cases claims authority. The son of man is lord of the Sabbath *because* the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The son of man has power to forgive sin, *because* the forgiveness of sin, though essentially a divine prerogative, may be sometimes exercised by man. In *Isaiah* (xl. 2) the prophet is bidden to proclaim to Zion that her iniquity is pardoned. Nathan (2 *Sam.* xii. 13) says to David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." But in the Gospels we find stronger phrases. No one thing is more strongly insisted on in the Gospels than the duty of men to

forgive those who sin against them, when repentant. In *Matt.* xviii. 18 Jesus is represented as declaring to the body of his disciples, not the Apostles only, that the power of forgiving sins rests with them. To such teaching the phrase, "The son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins," comes as a consummation. Whether or not this was the actual teaching of Jesus, it seems clear that it is thus that his words were interpreted by the Evangelists. The appeal from earth to heaven is not excluded. In his last hours Jesus is represented as saying of his executioners, "Father, forgive them," not "I forgive you." But the court of first instance, so to speak, for the forgiveness of sins seems to be fixed on earth.

It is difficult to expound the phrase son of man as used by Jesus without falling into the language of philosophy, which would be quite foreign to the lines of thought which belong to the Master. If we say that he claimed to embody the ideal man or the idea of man, we use Platonic language. If we say that he stood as high priest for the human race, we fall into the way of the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, and do not use the language of the earliest Christianity. If we say that he represented humanity as perfected and so made divine, we speak more in the fashion of Buddhism than of Christianity. But of these interpretations the first is more consonant to the Jewish genius than the others.

In contrast to these lofty claims, we may turn to a number of passages in the Gospels in which Jesus seems to be unconscious of this personal dignity, and to exalt, not himself but rather his message, his word or his teaching. It is not those who call him *Lord*, but those who obey his word, who will be justified in the last day. It is the message which he utters which will test men and divide them as sheep from goats. Those who hear his word and receive it are to him as brothers and sisters, nearer than his own mother to his heart. Often when he speaks of his message, Jesus seems to set aside his personality altogether, or to regard his person as a mere channel by which the word of God is made known to the world. Between this eclipse of personality and the strong assertion of personality which is prominent in other passages the mere critic may find contradiction. Some may think that



the two phases belong to different parts of the life of Jesus. We would rather consider the phenomenon as a fresh paradox of the divine life, a new illustration of the profound saying that he that loses his life shall find it. A personality merged in the divine will comes forth, not injured, but more powerful and commanding in relation to other men. One passage of the Gospel introduces this paradox with an abruptness which is startling. Jesus is represented as saying (*Matt.* xi. 28), "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart." Here we have a sublime assertion of personal dignity, an offer to mankind proclaimed from a level utterly above them, and at the same moment a profession of total self-renunciation. Yet surely, however paradoxical the phrase may sound, every word of it is justified in the Christian experience. It is not un instructive to compare the saying of Francis,<sup>1</sup> "The Lord hath called me by the way of simplicity and humility, and this way hath he pointed out to me in truth for myself, and for them that are willing to believe me and to imitate me."

It is a notable fact that whereas the Jesus of the Synoptics speaks frequently of himself under the designation son of man, he never directly applies to himself the title son of God. At the same time he does in a less direct manner claim the title, by continually speaking of God as his Father. And it is notable, as the commentators point out, that in speaking to his disciples he never refers to God as *our* Father, but either as *my* Father or *your* Father. The beginning of the Lord's prayer furnishes of course no exception to this rule: for there the Master is not praying himself, but teaching the disciples how to pray. If, then, we are to suppose that the Synoptic writers are accurate in this matter, we must conclude that Jesus meant to imply that his own sonship to God was closer and more sacred than could be that of the disciples. A very remarkable phrase, found in *Matthew* and *Luke*, must here be cited, "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any man know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever

<sup>1</sup> *The Mirror of Perfection*, trans. p. 120.

the Son willeth to reveal him." In this passage something closely like the Logos doctrine is put into the mouth of Jesus. But it stands by itself; and it would be very rash to regard it in its present form as authentic. Apart from this passage, and from Pauline and Johannine developments, our evidence suffices to show that Jesus claimed a sonship which was unique, but does not furnish us with an explanation of the claim. Commentators therefore, as is natural, differ widely in their interpretations. Some think that Jesus claimed only a Messianic sonship. Some regard him as claiming an ethical relationship to God of a sublime and unique character. Others venture into metaphysics, and found upon the words of Jesus some kind of doctrine of the Trinity. The evidence is probably insufficient for the establishment in a satisfactory fashion of any of these views.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE ETHICS OF JESUS

WE have already seen that the main features of the teaching of Jesus are recoverable. It would be quite unnecessary scepticism to doubt that the *logia* embodied in the Gospel of Matthew do convey to us in the main the actual teaching of the Master. This teaching may be best ranged under three heads: the legislation, the paradoxes, and the parables of Jesus.

Though it was not primarily Christian ethics which made in the world the fortune of the Church, yet it may well be doubted whether with a less pure code of morals her battle would have been won. There are now in Europe various revolutionary and nihilistic schools which bear a superficial resemblance to primitive Christianity; but they differ from it in the essential point, that whereas early Christianity tightened the laws of morality, these schools relax them. Especially in regard to the relations of the sexes, there is an astonishing contrast between the ideas of the earliest Church and the ideas of the partisans of the Revolution. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of this distinction.

The morality of the earliest Christians beyond doubt goes back to the Founder. It is impossible to suppose any other origin for such legislation as that of the Sermon on the Mount. It has been said that nearly all the ethical precepts of Jesus may be paralleled from the writings of Greek Philosophers and Jewish Rabbis; yet as a whole it is of surprising originality. There is some historic risk in holding the Jesus of history responsible for all the teaching contained in the early chapters

of Matthew. It is impossible to suppose that the Galilean teaching of the Master could pass from mouth to mouth and endure the alchemy of the Christian conscience and experience for thirty or forty years without becoming in some degree transmuted. But the interpretation which we find in *Matthew* resembles that in *Mark*, which gives us the most advantageous point we can hope to reach in our quest of the Founder's teaching. At any rate the First Gospel brings us immeasurably nearer to historic tradition than does the Fourth.

The ethical doctrine of Jesus is the very centre of his teaching. There can be little doubt that here was one of the secrets of his enormous personal influence. For what he taught was so closely intermingled with his life and action, that the teaching seemed to be a part of the character. Also we may say with confidence that we possess at all events the main features of that teaching. The Gospels, because they contain it, have been, and still are, a frequent source of the revivals of religion which from time to time come to stir the stagnant waters of religious convention. We have to speak, however slightly, first of the leading principles of the ethics of Jesus; and second, of the more detailed legislation which is contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

From the psychological point of view, the noteworthy feature of the original Christian ethics is the merging of morality in religion. The teaching in the Synoptic Gospels is that virtue and vice, good and evil, are not qualities dependent upon intellect nor upon knowledge. They may be shown as well by the unlearned as by the wise and prudent. And they do not consist in adherence to any outward and visible standard, but in the right attitude of heart and will. It is not properly action which is right or wrong, but the thought and intention which impelled to the action. This is the inwardness which is so marked a feature of the teaching of Jesus. It is not to be seen of men that his followers should strive, but to please the eyes of the Father who sees in secret. If the virtue of Christians shines out in the world, it should be by no intention of shining. But as a candle when it is ignited cannot help giving light, so a life which is kindled must shine out in the world and in society.

The good and acceptable condition of heart and life must be attained, if attained at all, by a relation to the will of God : no merely passive relation, but an active co-operation whereby man becomes a child of the Father in Heaven. It becomes his object to look at men as God looks at them, and to work for them as God works. But God reveals himself to man in more ways than one. He is revealed in outward nature, in the beauty of the flower and the joyousness of the bird, in the succession of sunshine and rain, and in the giving of fruitful seasons. These things men may see all around them, and should strive to bring their lives into harmony with them. But God is revealed not only in what is without, but also to the heart and conscience of those who draw near to him in spirit and in truth. And God also reveals himself in the lives of the good, which we see, and bless the heavenly giver of such lives. Nor can it be fairly doubted that Jesus claimed a special inspiration, so that his words and deeds more nearly represented the Heavenly Father than those of any of the sons of men.

The sum of goodness, according to this teaching, is to be in right relations towards the Father in Heaven, to act as he acts in the world, to follow his guidance in the heart, to merge self in the sense of a divine presence, to do not our own will, but the will of him that sent us. Thus one loves God with heart and soul and strength. And thus one loves men as also children of God, and so brethren, as partakers of the same inspiration and sent to the world for the same purpose. From harmony with God flows in this world peace and serene happiness, in spite of persecution and death, and the issue is an eternal life which nothing can injure, but which abides as a heavenly treasure, while all earthly things fade and pass.

This ethical attitude is reflected in many sublime sayings of the Sermon on the Mount. And it is embodied in what is certainly the most authentic utterance of Jesus which we possess, the Lord's Prayer. This prayer contains but six petitions, but three of them are expressions of desire that God's will may be done on earth, his name hallowed, his rule universal, so that earth may be a revelation of Heaven. This shows to what a degree the principle of the relation, of the



possible harmony, between the will of God and that of man lies at the foundation of Christianity. This principle is the alchemy which has transformed all existing religion, and made a great gulf of separation between the ancient and the Christian world. Such seems to me the root-principle of the ethics of Jesus, however slightly and imperfectly I may have expressed it.

In the Synoptic discourses Jesus dwells constantly and emphatically on the analogy between the revelation of nature and that of consciousness. The Creator and Sustainer of the world is declared to be also the kind and loving Father of men. And many analogies are pointed out between the facts of the material world and the laws of human life and the moral world. All the processes of nature, rightly understood, are lessons to prove that the same Heavenly Power lies at the root of the physical and the moral world. These two worlds are part of the same universe, and subject to similar laws. Jesus attained to a knowledge of God through his own inspired consciousness, but when he looked abroad, he saw in the world the working of the same kindly and orderly Power which lies at the basis of the highest human nature.

One finds, indeed, in our records of the life of Jesus, traces of another view: a view which regards the visible world as under the power of Satan, and wholly opposed to the kingdom of light. In the narrative of the temptation, Satan is represented as ruling in the visible world. And in the Fourth Gospel he is spoken of as the prince of this world. Whether there was really in the teaching of Jesus any element of this kind, it is not easy to determine. But such a view is singularly out of harmony with the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. And on the other hand it is natural that, when the infant Church was struggling to found an invisible kingdom of God amid opposition of all kinds, many of the Christian teachers should drift into the belief that the forces of the visible world, both physical and social, were in the hands of the Powers of Evil. This view has left many and profound traces in Christian feeling and belief. And it is by no means extinct in our days. The view that a good God is the author of all things, and the view that the visible world is in opposition to the God of the

spirit have probably both always existed in the Church. And very probably they will both always exist, since each seems to be directly based upon experience. To some thinkers the one view, and to some thinkers the other, will be commended by the course of their lives and their natural bent. Perhaps every one of us hovers and hesitates at times between the two views. But it was the Gnostics, like Marcion with his two deities of Creation and of Redemption, who chiefly maintained the inherent badness of the world. The Christian Church, though it could neither deny nor explain the existence of evil in the world, yet tried hard to remain true to the belief in a beneficent Creator.

In any case it is essentially Christian doctrine that things invisible are of a higher order than things visible, that man is not a mere offshoot of nature, but prior to nature and above it. To Jesus, as the greatest of idealists, there could scarcely be a question which, in order of importance and dignity, 'came first: man or the world. It was for man that the world was made, and physical nature was merely part of the abode contrived for him, part of the means of education which were to fit him for the service of God. Not only did the Creator of the world make man in his own image, but the Father and Friend of man made the world for him to dwell in, and organised it for high spiritual and moral ends.

The more detailed legislation of Jesus is also to be found in the long discourse in *Matthew*. In form it is a modification, a strengthening, a spiritualising, of the precepts of the Jewish law. Of these precepts some are superseded; others are retained, but put in a new light. For example, the commandments of Moses forbade murder and adultery: Jesus, in accord with the principle already stated, forbade the motions of the will which lead to these, anger against a brother, or the toleration of unchaste thought in the presence of a woman. In the same way the Jewish practices of prayer and fasting were transformed, according to the inwardness of the new doctrine, by being made secret: a transaction between God and the individual, not to be noted by those outside.

But other commandments of the Law are not modified but superseded. Not mere perjury is forbidden, but even the taking

of an oath. For the phrase "Thou shalt hate thine enemy," we have as a substitute "Love your enemies." And divorce, which was easy under the Jewish law, is under the Christian forbidden.

Beside the commands which seem to be suggested by the Mosaic Law stand some, of a still more thorough-going character, which do not stand in any close relation to it. Such are the very marked commands which have been placed by some reformers, such as Tolstoi, at the very foundation of Christian ethic. The disciples are bidden to give to every one that asks of them, hoping for nothing again. They are told that when they are smitten on one cheek they are to turn the other. And in fine their attitude towards the world around is to be one of non-resistance to evil. They are to take no thought for the morrow, but to live for the day in confidence that the Father in Heaven will provide what is necessary. And that this last injunction is rightly reported seems clear from the passage in the Lord's Prayer as to daily bread, which is in quite the same strain. And they are not to judge. This phrase seems to forbid any sitting in judgment on crime, such as being member of a law court, perhaps even taking part in any execution of a legal sentence against a convicted malefactor.

It is sufficiently clear that if Christians were to carry out literally these commands, they could not engage in business, could not belong to a profession, and would be the prey of the unprincipled and the grasping. Such principles, if at all generally acted on, would bring to an end all civil government, all military organisation, all industrial progress. This has become very clear in our days from the attempts of enthusiasts like Tolstoi. Unless we have recourse to the unsatisfactory and intolerable supposition that Jesus was entirely without practical wisdom, we must suppose one of two things. Either we must suppose that the commands were not meant to be taken literally, but only to be regarded as the extreme expressions of a tendency. Or else the intention was that they should be taken literally as rules of action, but only by a small and ascetic society moving in the midst of a hostile world.

Christians have usually held that the command as to non-

resistance of evil, and other commands like it, were not meant to be taken literally. They have introduced all sorts of distinctions and modifications which have practically neutralised their force. Some have held that the command of non-resistance applies only as regards one's personal injuries, but does not apply to injuries to society. This is, of course, absurd, since an injury to an individual is an injury to society. Some have fancied that the phrase as to thinking of the morrow forbids only anxiety which is excessive, an interpretation rendered impossible by the context. Some, like the Quakers, have taken literally certain phrases of the Sermon on the Mount, but not other phrases. Such a phrase as "Give to him that asketh of thee," they have certainly not taken literally. In fact, Christians generally have behaved as we might expect men to behave who profess to receive certain commands as divine, and yet feel it impossible to act upon them.

The cause of all these twists and deviations is the conviction that the admonitions of Jesus cannot be taken literally. But the fact is that they embody a code of conduct which has for more than two millennia been accepted literally by certain people. It is quite possible for a few detached enthusiasts, or even for a very small devoted community, to give up all resistance to evil, to forswear the possession of any worldly goods, and to live without care for the morrow. One of the most perfect types is found in the Buddhist ascetic living from day to day on the broken food offered to him, and wearing no garments but rags, spending all his days in meditation and in mortification of the body, ready to perish rather than to injure the smallest and meanest of animals. To what extent the influence of Buddhism had penetrated across Asia to Syria and Egypt we know not with certainty. *A priori* it would seem almost certain that it must have made its way. For centuries the missionaries of Buddhism had wandered through India and beyond it; and after the age of Alexander the Great, India lay open to the West. Buddhism was the ruling influence in India in the third century B.C. It has been strongly suspected that the Essenes, who formed large communities among the Jews in the first century B.C., were largely permeated by Buddhist influences. But however this may

be, it is certain that the ascetic who lived on alms and made no concession to worldly necessities was well known in the Levant in the time of our Lord. And from that time to the present there have been inside Christendom many who took literally the ascetic teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Such have been, for example, in earlier days the solitaries of the desert; and in more recent times the first Franciscan and Dominican friars.

The injunctions of Jesus, if taken literally, were perfectly practical for small societies of enthusiasts. But can we suppose that the formation of a small society was the object of the Master? And can we think that one, the chief note of whose teaching is the spiritualising of the existing Jewish ethics, would recommend to his followers a literal asceticism? In all things Jesus works back from outward conduct to the motive and the heart. His law of chastity, his law of charity, his precepts for fasting and Sabbath-keeping, are all couched in a purely spiritual vein. He looks away from outward results and all that the world can see to that which lies within, and is seen only by the eyes of the Father in Heaven. Is it likely that a great part of his teaching took quite another turn and insisted on outward conformity?

All these questions as to what the Master did mean and did not mean are very difficult. In the present state of our historic knowledge they are probably in the end insoluble. For there is undoubtedly intermixed in our Gospels with the genuine words of Jesus much that belongs to the next generation, much that the early Church adopted not from tradition merely, but from tradition modified and enlarged by a present revelation. No man can speak with definiteness as to the historic teaching of Jesus who has not gone over the Gospels with the most careful thought, and determined, in the language of Prof. Harnack, how much of the reported teaching of Jesus is primary, how much secondary, and how much tertiary. And in carrying out this task, the student must as far as possible sink his own preferences and individuality, and look at everything in the white historic light. Perhaps this is requiring more than it is in the nature of all save a very few to attain to.



Yet we may point out some indications which appear to be found in the Gospels that Jesus had a double intent: that he wished his practical rule of life to be taken literally by a few, and spiritually by the many. In support of this contention, I would appeal to his reply to the rich young man, and the instructions to the missionaries. To the young man who had a passion for perfection he said,<sup>1</sup> "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." The word perfect, *τέλειος*, used in Greece of those initiated into the mysteries, implies that in the thought of Jesus there was an inner circle of men whose devotion to the will of God was absolute. To these initiated disciples many of the directions in the Sermon on the Mount apply. To them some of the parables were privately explained. To them were given on certain occasions the directions as to behaviour on missionary journeys which, according to Matthew, were given to the twelve, and, according to Luke, to seventy attached disciples. These directions are notable. The missionaries were to carry "no bread, no wallet, no money in their purse," and not to take two garments. These directions, if really given, were obviously meant to be taken literally, and they enjoin on the envoys such outward conduct as would belong to a Buddhist mendicant or a wandering ascetic.

On the other hand, we do not find in the ordinary life of the Master and Apostles the extreme rules of ascetic life. Expenses were provided for by a purse to which disciples contributed, and the simple and joyous life of the party even roused against them in some quarters prejudices which had to be dispelled: "Thy disciples fast not," "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." And after the crucifixion, though the Apostles dwelt together, we find but seldom interference with the institution of private property. In some passages of the Gospels poverty is praised, but poverty is not generally made a condition of joining the society.

In this matter, as in many others, different customs and ways of feeling could alike find a precedent in the life of the Master. To the pure spirituality of Jesus the spirit of self-

<sup>1</sup> *Matt.* xix. 21

denial and the mortification of the flesh seemed to need no rules, but to be imposed by the power of the inner life. To himself poverty and celibacy were natural; but he did not erect them into a rule of the society; he only seems, in rare cases, to have pointed to them as the way to the highest earthly good.

Closely bound up with this question is another, Had Jesus an intention of forming an organised society? This question also requires great caution in dealing with our records, since it was so easy for words implying the existence of a society to slip into the traditions during the half-century when they were still fluid. It is notable that few, if any, great religious reformers have started with the intention of forming a society. They have started with an overmastering impulse in their own consciousness, with the need of doing the will of God themselves; and the society has grown up around them. *A priori* we should expect to find the same thing in the case of Jesus. And his ministry was so short, that there was no time for the action of all those motives of practical necessity which usually bear more and more strongly on the reformer as time goes on, compelling him to organise often almost against his will.

In considering this question, we must separate the word "society" from the word "organised." There can be no doubt that Jesus intended his followers to be distinguished from the rest of the Jewish world, following a different code of morals, recognising a higher ethical standard. The kingdom of heaven was to spread, or at least to be reflected, on earth. But, on the other hand, there is little trace in the Gospels of a constitution for the society. Many of the precepts ascribed to Jesus are inconsistent with any intention of organising.

As soon as a distinct organisation is discernible in the infant Church, it is borrowed from the ways and customs of the Greek cities of Asia and Europe, perhaps through the mediation of the scattered synagogues. And it is in Asia Minor that it develops earliest and most rapidly. This could not have been the work of the Founder, being foreign to the ideas and strange to the surroundings of Palestine. Bishops and Presbyters belong to the churches of Asia in the first place, and only

afterwards to Rome and Jerusalem. Was there, however, some earlier organisation? Unfortunately, in this matter our historical document is the Book of *Acts*, the earlier part of which, at all events, is a very unsatisfactory record of fact. Alike in the Gospels and in the *Acts* the twelve Apostles appear as a sort of college, in constant attendance on their Master while he was alive, and carrying on his work after his departure. Besides, a more miscellaneous crowd certainly followed the Master, and "ministered to him of their substance." On one occasion we read of the despatch of seventy missionaries through the cities of Judah. But the infant society, if such it could be called, was during the life of the Master altogether amorphous. Rites and ceremonies it had none save the Jewish. The Communion did not yet exist, and even baptism was probably, as we shall see later, not customary. The Lord's Prayer is the nearest approach to a confession of faith.

In fact, while all the elements of a new society were present in the years of ministry, they were in a fluid state. The crystallising touch came at the time which in a later chapter I have called the "Crisis of Christianity," at the death of the Founder. And contact with the Greek cities and the Hellenistic Synagogues of Asia Minor did the rest.

But if this is the case, it is clear that the ethics of Jesus, like the rest of his teaching, must have been, at all events primarily, individual and not social. No one, of course, can deny that he may have foreseen that, for the realisation on earth of the Kingdom of God, organisation would be necessary. But it would appear that he was content to impart the principles and the spirit which belong to the underlying divine order of the world, leaving to the future the working out in visible form of some reflex of that order. First principles and ideas, later creed and organisation, latest ceremony and art: such is the regular order in the establishment of a new or reformed scheme of religion. And the Founder of Christianity was not in the least likely to commit the error of trying to invert or alter the divinely established rule in such matters.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SAYINGS AND PARABLES OF JESUS

WE have next to consider the sayings and the parables of Jesus.

The practical wisdom of the world finds ordinary expression in proverbs or truisms, which condense into a sentence the experience of many generations of people. We are all acquainted with the ordinary worldly way of looking at things. The object of life, in this view, is the attainment of certain outward and visible objects of desire: riches, position, the founding of a family or the gratification of personal tastes. Pleasure or satisfaction is the result when one succeeds in attaining any of these; and the sum of pleasures makes up the happiness of life.

There is another wisdom which is not worldly, and which finds its expression not in truism but in paradox. Of paradoxes there are many kinds. We are sufficiently familiar in modern literature with paradox which is a mere literary artifice, used to strike the fancy and to secure attention. But there are other kinds of paradox which have been used by great teachers of all ages for conveying deeper truth, the underlying spiritual facts which are hidden beneath the surface of ordinary life. In this kind of speaking Jesus stands unrivalled.

It would not be possible to produce a more striking series of profound paradoxes than that which prefaces the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The real and inner wealth, which lies in the condition of heart and will, belongs to those who are

detached from earthly riches, and dull to their attraction. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The true enjoyment, even of visible things, belongs not to those who warp their souls in the effort to acquire them, but to those who in patience and gentleness are ready to make the best of what falls to them. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." It is not those who meet with all success and who escape all bereavement who are the happiest, but rather those who through sorrow rise above sorrow, into the region of perpetual peace.

When Luke gives us his version of these beatitudes, he places them all on a lower level, by not understanding their inwardness and depth. He writes, "Blessed are ye poor," instead of "Blessed are the poor in spirit"; and "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh," for the other sentence which we have cited. It is not at all strange that many or most of the hearers of the preaching of the Master should thus have taken his words at a lower level. Many must have supposed that he was contrasting the humbleness and poverty of the present condition of his disciples with the loftier state which they should assume when he brought in as Messiah the visible kingdom of God. Then they who had shared the Master's poverty should partake of his wealth, and those who had been despised and neglected should be crowned with glory and honour. The miraculous victory of the Christ would introduce upon earth a new state of things, in which those who had had faith to receive him in dishonour should reign with him in splendour.

And as many of the contemporaries of Jesus took the paradoxes of his preaching as prophecies of his reign upon earth, so many of his followers from that day to this have taken them as a gospel of the future life, of that world beyond the grave where vice shall be humbled and virtue triumphant. They have borne the sufferings which fell upon them as Christians in the full hope that for every pang thus endured an exact recompense was laid up for them on the other side of the grave, while they would see the vicious and the worldly suffering the torments which await those who are enemies of the Church of God.



Now it is quite possible that, in the teaching of Jesus, the triumph of the deeper good over the superficial evil may have been spoken of in the future tense, as a prophecy of the course of events in the world, or in the supersensual mood, as a statement of the laws of the realm of the risen dead. Unless the expressions which the Master used had borne some relation to the state of his hearers' thoughts and beliefs they would not have been comprehended, nor even remembered. But be this as it may, the essential thing, that which makes for us the inestimable value of the teaching of Jesus, is his marvellous insight into the nature of the higher life, which all about us is intertwined with the lower life. Like the rays of light named after Röntgen, his eyes passed through the outer show and brought to light the more solid truths which lay beneath.

It is this power of looking beyond that which is without to that which is within which marks the great religious teacher. In every great revival of religion among men, we may discern its working. At the time when Jesus appeared, there was a ferment of patriotism among the Jews, a passionate conviction that the bands of Rome must be broken before the kingdom of righteousness could be established. The tendency was too strong to be counteracted even by the influence of Jesus. And it led his compatriots straight to the Flavian war and the horrible sack of Jerusalem. But the Kingdom of God which Jesus had to found came not with observation. It was not of this world, and it was set up, not by fighting, but by living and suffering. The money tribute, the badge of national subjection, was to go to Cæsar; but to God must be paid the higher tribute of purity and love and self-renunciation.

In this light the paradoxes of Jesus have been regarded by the most spiritual of his followers. Let us return to one of those already cited, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>1</sup> Read in the light of ordinary common-sense, no saying could be more absurd. The meek are thrust aside in the fierce competition of life. It is the strong men who know what they want and are determined to get it who reach success and occupy the world. And yet the meek and

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is really a quotation from Psalm xxxvii. 11; but in the new connection it acquires a new meaning.

gentle spirit carries with it such a faculty of sympathy, and such power of enjoyment, that it may derive far more satisfaction out of the little it attains than more restless and ambitious souls can extract from far more extensive possessions. Happiness is a function not of external things but of heart and will, and it must develop from within.

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you.” Here we reach a still deeper depth or a still higher height. For even the meek and self-renouncing cannot be happy in persecution, by the mere power of meekness. This will mitigate their sufferings; but something more is necessary to actual happiness, a vehement love of righteousness, and a joy that one is counted worthy to suffer in its cause. It is no piece of mysticism, but matter of sober history, that multitudes have “rejoiced and been exceeding glad” in the midst of trial and persecution, when they were upheld by a good conscience and an eager love of the cause in which they suffered. Even death, which naturally and physiologically is the greatest of evils, has for thousands lost its sting when confronted with some lofty emotion. “Death,” writes Lord Bacon, “is no such terrible enemy, when a man has so many attendants about him that can win the combat of him. Revenge triumphs over Death; Love slights it; Honour aspireth to it; Grief flyeth to it; Fear pre-occupateth it.” Lord Bacon writes usually as a profound observer of life. In this case, the insight of his genius reaches beyond the mere outer show, and penetrates to some of the deeper springs of human nature. But he does not see so far as the great religious teacher who sees not merely that death may be overcome, but that the triumph over it may be but a step in the higher life.

The sum of all the paradoxes of Jesus is found in that profound saying, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.” Here again there are various ways of interpreting. No doubt the promise has encouraged and strengthened many a martyr, holding a celestial crown before eyes growing dim in death. And this rendering of the saying is by no means illegitimate: it is one side of the truth but not

the central truth. The central truth is, that the crucifying of the lower and obvious self leads to the exaltation and furthering of the higher and more real self. This is, as we have seen, the central truth of religion: a truth realised by Gautama and by Plato as well as by the later Isaiah and the Founder of Christianity. But the authors of great religions read the truth each in his own way, and from such reading each religion takes a tone of its own. The great difference between the Buddhist and the Christian reading is simple. To the Buddhist all self is evil, and when it is cleared away the perfect bliss which remains is Nirvana. To the Christian only the lower self is evil, and when it is overcome there remain character and will, which do not disappear as they are brought nearer to the divine, but become more real and permanent.

In the Synoptic Gospels there is scarcely a page which is not studded with these jewel-like paradoxes. For example, the phrase in *Matthew* xi. 29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart," is in form an extreme paradox. That a teacher should proclaim himself lowly in heart, and on that ground claim obedience, seems to the first thought absurd. Yet it is quite true when tried by the canons of the higher life. The man who has set aside all pride and sensitiveness has also set aside all hesitation and self-consciousness, and can command more absolutely than the most rigorous despot. He calls on men not so much to obey him as to follow him into the ways of peace. And an accusation of presumption in such a case has absolutely no ground whereon to stand.

So in another sphere, that of knowledge, the paradox of Jesus, though false from the point of view of the world, is true when judged by the laws of the spiritual life. Knowledge in conduct and religion, he taught, is attained by those who are childlike in heart, whether educated or not, and is reached by the method of obedience rather than by study. This is not the psychology of science, which regards any bent of the will as a hindrance in the path of impartial knowledge. It is not the psychology of the world, which maintains that love is blind and none so clear-sighted as he who has fullest control of his feelings. But it is the psychology of religion. As we have in

a previous chapter observed, the impulse to the will precedes the enlightenment of the mind, and until one has yielded to the impulse which leads to good, divine wisdom does not come. When it does come, it does not bring knowledge of outward or material things, nor of the events of history, but it does throw light on the nature and the ends of conduct, and it does furnish a test of doctrine, seeing that doctrine is a reading into the intellectual sphere of principles of conduct.

Another paradoxical passage is that terribly stern warning as to removing the eye or the hand which offend. To worldly wisdom it may seem obvious that a man should make the best of every faculty, widen his experience, look into everything with impartial eye, and do all that comes to his hand. Mere moralists advise a life conformed to nature, and suited to one's surroundings. They are like a physician who recommends certain habits and medicines as conducive to health. But religion comes in with the knife of the surgeon, and tells us that eye and hand, desire and active powers, may be so foul and polluted that there is no remedy but excision. This is not a preaching of asceticism. The text does not say that a man is the better for being maimed. But it does say that in some cases only through maiming can come salvation. And the analogy of the medical art is here entirely on the side of the teacher of religion. Every operation of the surgeon is a sort of practical paradox, the violent diminution of life in order to further life; and those who submit to such operations, submit in a faith which is in essence not unlike religious faith. It is a new phase of the analogy between the laws which belong to the body and those of the soul which Jesus has set forth.

To those who meet some bereavement, or are overtaken by a mastering emotion, the ordinary course of everyday life seems often an unreal show: as such it is constantly represented by those great teachers who are possessed by the passion of the spiritual life. And the things which to them appear the great realities are not matters of sense nor of intellect, but are fragments of another order of being intruding into the ordinary ways of mankind with a crushing force. Nor does education ordinarily help men readily to perceive the working of higher

laws : such perception comes far more usually from discipline of the will, and love of the divine purposes.

Much of the teaching of Jesus was imparted by parables. Mark and Matthew<sup>1</sup> tell us that he spoke to the larger circle of his auditors in parables only ; while to his smaller circle of disciples he expounded these parables in private. We have a summary of the more intimate instruction in the so-called Sermon on the Mount ; but even of that discourse a great part consists of parables.

The parable was a means of instruction admirably suited to the conditions of the teaching of the Founder. In the first place, it was easy to remember these brief and pregnant tales, and they would pass from hearer to hearer without much loss or deterioration. And in the second place, parables could be made the vehicle of meaning far deeper and more varied than the hearers could fully appreciate. Had they been told only the morals of the tales without the tales themselves, many would have been offended, many would have misunderstood, much would have been forgotten. As it is, the parables of our Lord have remained from his day to ours unexhausted mines of spiritual truth, with a message to every succeeding generation.

The parables of Jesus are statements of profound spiritual truth, of the facts and experiences of the higher life in terms of the lower life, whether that of plants or animals, or of mankind. And as the laws of all life are at bottom the same, the course of scientific discovery, which has laid bare to us more and more of the conditions and phenomena of the life of the world about us, has enabled us to find new depths of meaning in the Christian parables. The question, however, of the meaning which was attached to them by the first hearers is no easy one, and can only be solved by long and difficult historical studies. And the question of their primary meaning in the mouth of him who uttered them is deeper still and still more obscure. Our solution of this problem will depend on the theories which we hold as to the person of the Founder, the character of the Church which he founded, the true nature of the life of religion, and so forth.

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* iv. 33 ; *Matt.* xiii. 34.



Nor must we ever lose sight of the fact that as the Gospels were written only after many years of verbal tradition, it is quite probable, or even certain, that even the parables of the Synoptic Gospels are not free from alteration. In a few cases it is likely that parables of the *School* of Jesus, the work of immediate disciples, were ascribed to the Master himself, or that parables of contemporary Rabbis, being greatly admired by the early Christians, were by them claimed as utterances of their own Founder. This sort of interpolation, however, would be rare compared with other and less violent perversions. The alteration of a few words in a parable really uttered by Jesus might in some cases produce a distinct change in the meaning of the tale. Or it might be that the parable itself was preserved with substantial accuracy, but its background was changed so that its whole tone appeared different. To all these possibilities of perversion we must be alive: perversion unintentional but so natural that it could only have been prevented by a sort of standing miracle.

It would scarcely cause regret to liberal modern Christians if it were ascertained that some of the Parables ascribed to Jesus did not come from him in the form in which we possess them. The tales of the Unjust Steward, for instance, and of Dives and Lazarus, have long been difficult of satisfactory interpretation, and we would willingly think that they have received at least a twist in the course of their oral tradition. Yet on the whole we shall perhaps be wisest if we suppose that, with very few exceptions, the parables of the Synoptic Gospels have at least a root in the actual discourses of Jesus. We can, however, clearly see that, in the interpretation of parable at all events, the first disciples were often misled by some of the *idola* of the Church. This will appear from the internal evidence offered by the text of the Evangelists themselves. We may roughly arrange the parables into groups.

The largest and most important group consists of the parables which may be called those of personal experience or individual religion. Parables such as those of the pearl of great price, of the unforgiving servant, of the labourers hired at various hours, but receiving every man a penny, have an obvious as well as a profound meaning in the experience of the

individual. In particular, the noble group of parables which occur in the Third Gospel, those of the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Good Samaritan, have reference to the work in the heart of man carried on by divine influence, and bear a meaning which is out of relation to any special circumstances. These last, however, can scarcely in strictness be called parables. They are rather tales directly inculcating high principles of action, or embodying truths of the higher life.

One or two parables in *Matthew* or *Mark* seem to refer primarily to the growth of a society. Such are the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, which illustrate the rapid spread of a higher spirit when once it receives course among men. But these parables also are so general and so simple in character that they image not only the rise of Christianity, but that of any higher creed or better impulse among men.

Next we may place the group of parables in which the tale of the wise and foolish virgins and the tale of the talents are conspicuous. Here opinions may differ as to the primary meaning. Do they refer to that coming of the Son of Man which takes place in every life, determining its destinies for better or for worse? Or is the reference more special, to some particular coming of the bridegroom or return of the master, which would be uppermost in the minds of the hearers? And of what kind would this coming be? All the parables which may be called the Parables of the Kingdom belong to this group, and may be interpreted in a lower or higher, a more special or more general, a materialist or a spiritual fashion.

Firstly, these parables may be taken in a sense fundamentally Jewish. There can be no doubt that at the beginning of our era the religious thought and hope of the Jews were intensely set on the appearance of a great national deliverer or Messiah who should renovate and restore Israel, and found upon the earth a wide dominion. The more politically-minded of the race thought most of shaking off the yoke of the Cæsars and establishing an empire. The more spiritually minded thought more of the spiritual baptism of the people, the setting up of a kingdom of righteousness and of peace, so that in Israel all the nations of the world should recognise a guide

and a deliverer. But the Messiah was to be no ordinary prophet or king, since in his reign the pious Israelites who had fallen asleep in death were to live again and to share the glories of an ideal realm. Such was at the time the form into which the genius of the Hebrew race had thrown the passion for the higher life which has always been the noblest possession of that race.

While their Master lived, the disciples of Jesus were earnestly expecting, in spite of his continual protest, that he would come forth suddenly as a national deliverer. And after his death, they constantly expected to see him shortly return in the clouds of heaven to renew and to judge Israel and the world. Their minds being constantly set in this key, they would naturally accept all the Parables of the Kingdom with a bias. They would interpret them in accordance with their expectations of a near and visible reign of the Saints. And they might be expected sometimes unconsciously to modify the parables themselves, to make them more susceptible of such explanation.

In all societies those who take a materialistic view must be the majority. No doubt among the early Christians many merely accepted the current expectations of a kingdom rather national than spiritual, founded in the respect and fear of the surrounding peoples rather than in righteousness and holiness. But there were others to whom the phrase Kingdom of Heaven had another and a higher meaning. They hoped that before the second coming of the Master a divine society might exist and increase upon earth. Before the conversion of St. Paul there was in Jerusalem a church organised under the direction of the Apostles, and regarding itself as the representative on earth of its departed head. St. Paul developed and spiritualised the idea of the community with Christ upon earth, just as he developed and spiritualised baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and the idea of salvation by faith. To him the Church was the earthly body of Christ, his blameless bride, a society which carried on upon earth the life which had begun with the birth of Jesus.

Secondly, then, it is in relation to the Christian community, considered as an ideal unity, that some of the Parables of the

Kingdom would be most readily interpreted. Parables such as that of the mustard seed and of the leaven applied very naturally to the rapid growth of a new society in the midst of the Jewish and Heathen world. And they would not apply to a sudden and outward revelation of the Kingdom. The seed and the leaven work slowly and imperceptibly, until after a time they are found to have completely changed their surroundings.

There is one parable in the three Gospels which stands somewhat apart from the rest, and which does seem to have a definite application to the existing state of things. This is the parable of the vineyard which is leased by its owner to husbandmen, who withhold from him its fruits and destroy his messengers, finally slaying his own son. All the Evangelists observe that the Jewish rulers regarded this parable as spoken against them. And even apart from this, the parable bears on the face of it an intention to bring home to the ruling powers their unfaithfulness to their trust, and to foretell the end of their reign. This is an essentially Jewish parable, but it stands in a class by itself.

It may safely be said that the great majority of the parables of Jesus are of quite another character than this, with less reference to immediate circumstance, and more bearing on spiritual experience. They may best be regarded as directly embodying the facts of the spiritual life as disclosed in the consciousness of individuals. Even the parables already mentioned, those of the mustard-seed and the leaven, present us with a very truthful image of the gradual rise and spread of the higher life in the heart. In the case of many of the parables, such as that of the labourers who received every man a penny, that of the pearl of great price, that of the talents, and others, the individual interpretation lies nearest and is most satisfactory. And in other groups of parables, such tales as that of the lost sheep and the Prodigal Son, that of the Good Samaritan, and others, the application to conduct and to the life of individuals is distinctly predominant. An interesting analogy may be found in the Platonic writings. It has been well observed by Dr. Westcott that Plato puts the myths which have a personal and ethical bearing in the mouth of

Socrates; the cosmic myths in the mouths of others. This distinction seems to have historical basis. In the same way, we may with most confidence attribute to Jesus those parables, and those interpretations of parables, in which the ethically spiritual tendency is most clear.

That this is not a mere personal view of the writer may best be shown by considering the testimony to be found in the Gospels themselves, as to the way in which the Founder wished his parables to be considered.

In one instance we possess an explanation of a parable which purports to come from Jesus himself; it is attached to the parable of the sower, which is in itself one of the most clear and perspicuous. The lines on which it runs are familiar to every reader of the New Testament, "The sower soweth the word," with what follows, showing on what kind of human soil the seed of the word may fall, and what kind of fruit it will bear in the lives of various classes of hearers. In this case parable and explanation alike are given in all the Synoptic Evangelists; both alike belong to the earliest teaching of Christianity, and both have every appearance of belonging to the Founder. But it is noteworthy that the interpretation is almost as wide and as capable of various renderings as is the parable itself. It amounts scarcely to more than this, "The sowing of seed has a parallel in the spiritual life, and the results are similar in the one case and in the other."

It is very instructive to compare with this explanation another which is found in the First Gospel only.<sup>1</sup> The parable here explained is that of the tares of the field, of the farmer who sows wheat in his land, and of the enemy who by stealth sows tares among the wheat; the tares and the wheat being left to grow up together until the harvest, when the tares shall be burned and the wheat stored in the granary. It is supposed by some critics that this parable originated entirely in the conditions of the early Church, and does not come from the Founder. But it seems to me at least as probable that the parable itself is authentic and only the interpretation a later addition. For it is clear that this parable may be explained in precisely the same fashion as that of the sower. The wheat

<sup>1</sup> *Matt.* xiii. 37.



which is sown is the word: the tares of this parable, like the springing weeds of the parable of the sower, are the evil teachings of the world and the devil, which choke the growth of the word. The harvest would be death, when the fruits of man's life are judged, and what is worldly and false in him perishes. But the explanation given in the text of the Gospel is quite different to this. The parable is made to refer not to the facts of the spiritual life, but to the second coming of the Son of Man. The seed is not the word, but good men; and the tares are not the deceits of the world, but the human enemies of the kingdom of God; the harvest is not death, but the coming of the Messiah in his glory.

It may be strongly suspected that the explanation of our text does not come from Jesus himself. There is some unlikeness to the teaching of the Master in the representation of evil men as put into the world by the devil.<sup>1</sup> And the writer of the Gospel seems to have had a passing sense of this, for he is not consistent in his expressions. In v. 38 he writes, "The tares are the children of the wicked one"; but in v. 41 he speaks of the tares as "all *things* that offend, and them which do iniquity." Further, we know to what a surpassing degree the idea of the Second Coming dominated the minds of the first generation of Christians: to this subject I must return in a future chapter. It seems in view of these facts not unreasonable at least to suspect that the explanation of the parable given in our narrative is incorrect; and that it really was, like that of which I have already spoken, in origin a parable of the higher life, and probably authentic.

It is impossible in this place to discuss in more detail the meaning of the various parables of Jesus. Perhaps enough has been said to justify the assertion, the only assertion necessary to our present purpose, that the parables embody directly facts and experiences of the spiritual life. In some cases more direct reference seems to be intended to the spiritual life as it appears in communities. In other cases it is the life of individuals which seems to be most prominent in the mind of the author of the parable. This distinction, however, is but of moderate importance, since the phenomena of the higher life

<sup>1</sup> I am, of course, aware of the language attributed to Jesus in *John* viii. 38-44.

in societies are closely parallel to the phenomena which are to be observed in the consciousness of individuals. But it appears to be a misapprehension of the true purpose and meaning of the parables when they are interpreted, as is that of the tares of the field in Matthew's Gospel, in relation to the expected Second Coming of the Son of Man. Such an interpretation is a confusing of parable and prophecy such as would naturally arise in the minds of the first disciples. And it is equally a misinterpretation to regard them as belonging to a future life and a world beyond the grave. They state the facts of experience, not the probabilities of a future state; though, of course, the best basis for our hopes of the future must lie in a perception of existing fact.

The teaching of the Jesus of the Synoptics contains many precepts as to the way in which his disciples are to bear themselves in the world, as to their duty to God and their neighbours. It contains a full revelation of the relation of the human will to the divine, and of the divine life which arises from the communion of God with man. It lays bare an ideal world, the Kingdom of Heaven, which may to some extent be worked into the fabric of the world of sense. It is full of the sublime paradoxes which are the highest truths, showing how the real lies under the seeming, and how to gain his truer life a man must be ready to sacrifice his apparent life.

But in the Synoptists there will be found no system of doctrine. The facts of experience are set forth, but they are not worked into a coherent system. This is indeed generally recognised. It is a commonplace to contrast the intensely ethical teaching of the Master with the doctrinal teaching of his followers. No one has done this more luminously or with more genius than Matthew Arnold in his inimitable work, *Literature and Dogma*. But it is easy for any ordinary person to arrive at the conclusion which Arnold enforces with unmatched eloquence, by merely going over in succession the clauses of one of the Creeds of Christendom, and observing how little relation the affirmations of the Creed have to the Sermon on the Mount, or to the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I am aware that many people think that though the

statements of the Christian Creeds cannot be directly based on the utterances of Jesus, yet they can be by processes of reasoning worked out of them. To refute this view would be a long and a difficult task, which I do not propose here to attempt. The works of Matthew Arnold in particular render superfluous any attempt to rediscuss questions which he has treated with complete mastery. The truth is that in matters of doctrine reasoning is not to be wholly relied on. Reasoning is to be trusted in the field of sense and of sensuous experience, actual or possible, but in dealing with that which is beyond experience, reason is like a bird which should try to fly in a vacuum. On this subject I have already enlarged. But I may point out that, as a matter of fact, theologians, as any one may see by consulting their works, do not usually go to the Synoptic discourses for statements of doctrine, or even for the bases of doctrine, but to the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CHRISTIAN MIRACLE

WE now pass from the teaching to the life of Jesus as recorded by our authorities. In so doing we leave a not easy task for one far more difficult. The first fact in regard to that life which presents itself to us is its setting of miracle.

Miracles have been in all ages of the world's history attributed to those who appeared to have a spiritual mission for mankind. In India, as Sir A. C. Lyall has shown,<sup>1</sup> a religious teacher does not gain a following unless he is credited with miraculous powers. Even if reformers and saints do not claim such powers, yet if their personalities are impressive a crop of miracles soon springs up around them. Among the Jews at all periods of their history there has been a tendency to scan eagerly every man of remarkable character or insight with the view of finding in his deeds traces of superhuman powers; and when such powers have been discovered or imagined in a teacher, converts have flocked after him with a zeal which no mere teaching would have kindled. St. Paul rightly declared the seeking for a sign the mark of the Jewish mind, as the love of wisdom marked the educated Greeks. And in the history of Christianity the saint has usually proved his title to sainthood by doing wonders, whether alive or dead.

Indeed, far beyond Christian saint and Jew and Greek, into the mists which lie about the beginnings of civilisation, we can trace the wonder-worker. And we can see him at work in our own day in Africa. The medicine man of the savage would be

<sup>1</sup> *Asiatic Studies*, p. 113.

nothing accounted of if he did not turn men into animals, make rain, give his followers spells for the cure of disease, the defeat of enemies, the capture of game. It is a great step in civilisation and in the moralising of society when these powers are connected in the general belief with intellectual and moral pre-eminence rather than with the mere possession of secrets and charms. That the attribution of miraculous powers to men persists from age to age proves that there are facts at the basis of the belief: probably facts misunderstood.

In reality, the belief seems to rest on a confusion very natural before the rise of accurate observation: a confusion between the power of men over the souls and bodies of other men and their power over external things. A chief with force of will and character seems to radiate energy over those about him. A medicine man who has skill in his profession can govern by it the minds and even the bodies of those who approach him. The extent of the power of man over man among the uncivilised is enormous, and its limits have never been clearly mapped out. The phenomena of mesmerism and telepathy are but specimens of a vast mass of fact which is as yet but little understood. The power of man over lower and inanimate nature stands on quite another basis. The savage and the barbarian do not understand the rigidity of this distinction. It is only by slow degrees that man has discovered how uniform and far-reaching are the laws of the visible world.

The lines on which the modern educated critic has to deal with miracles are clear. First, he has to distinguish between miracles proper, that is, complete deviations from the course of nature, and remarkable human phenomena which do not violate that course.<sup>1</sup> Wonders of some kind are so frequent a phenomenon of religious revivals that it would be indeed strange if they were absent from the rise of Christianity. But miracles proper come into another category.

The events in the life of the Founder on which many Christians fix their faith are of a distinctly miraculous character. But the educated world has for many years been steadily proceeding in the direction of the elimination of the miraculous

<sup>1</sup> This distinction is insisted on in Dr. E. A. Abbott's work *The Kernel and the Husk*.



from history. For a century past there have been pitted against one another, on the one side the antecedent improbabilities of miracles, on the other the testimony that they took place. But now the continual growth of science has strongly increased the improbability that miracles properly so-called should occur, and the progress of criticism has infinitely weakened the evidence which exists in their favour. And moreover, the study of psychology and of anthropology has made it very much more easily intelligible that the belief in the occurrence of miracles should arise without the fact of their occurrence.

In regard to miracles proper, then, the question before us is not whether they took place or not, but how the belief that they did take place can have arisen. And it may fairly be said that anthropology is by no means unequal to the discussion of this question. The false position in which miracles are often placed in relation to the origin of Christianity is in part an unfortunate legacy to our times of the materialism of the last century. Writers like Paley so deeply impressed upon the educated in England that the evidences of Christianity rested mainly upon a basis of miracle, that we find it hard to rise above such views.

It is refreshing to turn to the contrast offered to them in St. Paul's autobiography in 2 *Corinthians*. Driven by the attacks of his enemies to set forth his claims to the apostolate, he passionately sketches the nature of his claims on the respect and obedience of the Church at Corinth. He begins with his Jewish descent (xi. 22); then narrates the perils and sufferings which he has undergone for Christ (xi. 23-33); next he dwells on his strongest claim to apostolic inspiration, the visions and personal revelations bestowed on him by the Lord (xii. 1-10); lastly, he mentions in one single verse the signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα καὶ δυνάμεις) which had marked his stay at Corinth. Though he claims the extraordinary powers possessed by other apostles, yet he deems them barely worthy of mention in comparison with his sufferings for Christ, and his communion with his risen Lord.

In the speech given to Peter on the Day of Pentecost

(*Acts* ii. 22) the same three words (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα καὶ δυνάμεις) are used in speaking of the miraculous element which had accompanied the life of Jesus on earth. And there can be no doubt that any attempt to eliminate from that life as recorded in the Gospels all that is extraordinary and unusual in the relations of our Lord to the visible world must result in its complete dissolution into myth and fancy. However far up towards its source we may trace the stream of the great biography, we still find discourses and wonders so closely intermingled that if we refuse to credit the wonders we deprive the discourses of all claim to authenticity, except such as they may possess in their own character.

When, however, we cease to confuse all that was extraordinary in the life of Jesus and his Apostles under the general term wonders or miracles, and endeavour to distinguish classes and circumstances among the wondrous works, we immediately find that our testimony in regard to some classes of wonders is very much stronger and clearer, and in regard to other classes almost evanescent.

In all ages, times of great religious excitement and revival have been marked by a series of remarkable human phenomena, imperfectly understood, and having in them elements which must certainly be called supernatural, if by the natural we mean the ordinary experience of daily life, yet which need not be supernatural in any extreme sense of the word. Such is the speaking with tongues of which we have so vivid a description, as seen in the Church of Corinth, in 1 *Corinthians* xiv., and which has been of occasional recurrence in Christian churches. And such is faith-healing: a phenomenon which in a degraded form may be studied in the phenomena of hypnotism, and which in a far more noble and spiritual form has been a frequent accompaniment of outbreaks of Christian and Mohammedan enthusiasm.

I am no adherent of the wild theories of modern spiritualists, and I regard with the utmost distrust and aversion the anti-moral experiments of the hypnotists. Yet taking the evidence as it stands, hypnotism certainly seems to dispose finally and completely of the cruder sort of materialist theories as to the constitution of man and of the world.

Whatever it does not prove, it certainly has proved in a remarkable way the predominance of will and mind over the body and material conditions. And thus whole groups of so-called miracles recorded in history take quite a new aspect, and pass out of the domain of the incredible into that of the credible. Wonders of healing, in particular, cannot now be called in any true sense of the word miraculous.

We may begin with the marvels recorded of Paul by others if not by himself. In one place (1 *Corinthians* xiv. 18) he claims the power of speaking with tongues, setting small store by it. The biography in the latter half of the *Acts* is not entirely satisfactory, having too much in it of the style of the literary compiler. We know also from the comparison of the Gospel of Luke with the other Synoptic Gospels, that the writer of *Acts* had a decided liking for what was miraculous.<sup>1</sup> Yet of the remarkable deeds attributed to St. Paul by this writer, none indicate miraculous power over external nature, but all merely a great force of intellect and will over men's minds, and through men's minds on their bodies. Of ordinary miracles of healing and of the casting out of evil spirits we need not speak in detail. That many diseases, among others epilepsy and what the ancients call demoniac possession, do yield to moral and volitional force is a fact sufficiently familiar to us. Whether any of the particular diseases which Paul is said to have healed were of another character, it is useless to inquire, since we cannot trust our authorities in such matters of detail.

As a sort of complement to the healing of the sick, Elymas was by Paul smitten with blindness. But we are told that the blindness was temporary; and temporary blindness is every day inflicted on patients by physicians who work by mesmerism and hypnotism. The restoration of Eutychus has only been made into a miracle by the bystanders. The narrative in *Acts* (xx. 9) merely says that the youth fell from a height and was taken up to all appearance dead; but that Paul declared him to be still alive. As to other supposed Pauline miracles, the escape from prison (*Acts* xvi. 25), the incident of the viper at

<sup>1</sup> For instances, see the article "Gospels" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, x. 809.

Melita (*Acts* xxviii. 3), and so forth, they could only with reason be called miraculous, if the writer of *Acts* is supposed to be verbally inspired; if we suppose a little margin of human inaccuracy in the accounts, they become merely events of which the explanation is not easy, because we know so few of the circumstances of them.

Thus it seems certain that when Paul speaks of signs and wonders and powers as accompanying his ministry, he must mean that he claimed the power to heal diseases, to cast out demons, to speak with tongues and the like; and we cease to wonder that to these gifts he incomparably preferred the "visions and revelations of the Lord," which raised him to another sphere of being, and even his perils and sufferings in the Christian cause.

It is always the soundest plan in investigating the phenomena of nascent Christianity to begin with St. Paul, who is to us in his letters so real and so human, and to work back from him to the far more vague and shadowy persons who stand nearer to the cradle of the faith.

Next let us consider the wonders wrought by Peter as recorded in the earlier chapters of the *Acts*. It has long ago been noticed that they present a curious parallelism to those of Paul. But in each case the marvel recorded of Peter is of a more strange and striking character than that recorded of Paul. Paul smites Elymas with temporary blindness; Peter strikes Ananias and Sapphira dead with a word. Paul and Silas escape from prison in consequence of an earthquake, but Peter is visited in prison by an angel who brings him forth, while doors open before him of their own accord, and that on two separate occasions (*Acts* v. 19, xii. 7). From Paul's person handkerchiefs are taken to the sick, and they recover (*Acts* xix. 11); but the shadow of Peter passing by is so potent that it does away with the need for any material contact, and the sick are equally cured (*Acts* v. 15). This contrast is singularly instructive, and seems to indicate one or both of two things: first, that the writer of *Acts* stood at a greater distance from Peter, so that the marvels of his life had more space and time to grow and spread before reaching that writer; or second, that the personality of Peter was of such a

character that marvels more readily centred about it than about Paul.

The suggestion furnished us by the second of these probabilities seems to me especially valuable; and I propose to return to it presently. Meantime let us consider the miracles of the Gospels; to see if they also may be easily divided into classes. No doubt such an attempt has already been made by many abler and more learned writers; yet I venture to attack the problem in my own way, not attempting to be complete or exhaustive.

Of the wonders attributed in the Gospels to Jesus, the great majority are works of healing. In Mark's Gospel, which is the most primitive and trustworthy of all, such deeds are so wrought into the very fabric of the life of Jesus, that they cannot be removed without destroying it, nor can they be entirely discredited without a quite unnecessary scepticism. The soberest historical criticism must allow that the wisdom and beauty of the teaching of our Lord make it a far more astonishing feature of history than almost any degree of power over men's minds and bodies. The teaching is far more miraculous than the deeds of healing; and since there is no possibility of denying the teaching (for who could have invented it?), the lesser wonder may pass in the shadow of the greater. But at the same time we cannot trust our authorities as to the details of any particular cure. They were not trained observers; and such a notion as that certain bodily failings yield to moral causes, while others do not, would be entirely outside their horizon. Many of the accounts in the Synoptic Gospels of cures wrought by our Lord are cases in which the nerves and brain are the main seat of the disorder. These were at the time regarded as the result of possession by an evil spirit, and are so spoken of in the Gospels. It is quite clear that the mere prevalence of this belief, combined with the belief, equally widespread, that evil spirits could be exorcised by great teachers and prophets, must have made the sufferers extremely susceptible to moral influences in the attack on their diseases. Most instructive in this aspect is a passage in *Matthew* xii. The Pharisees, bitter opponents of Jesus, are represented as trying to minimise the impression caused by



the Master's exorcisms of evil spirits. But they do not attempt to deny that the exorcism is a fact; they only say that it must result from some compact with Beelzebub, the chief of the evil spirits. And Jesus in replying to them says, "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" as if the expulsion of devils were quite a recognised branch of super-physical medicine. No doubt we are also told that Jesus healed diseases of another kind, little related to the nerves. It seems wisest in these cases to leave open the question whether the narrative is inaccurate, or whether the power of mind and will over the bodies of men is greater than we are at present disposed to think.

We must not pass on without a few words on the fact, which can scarcely be doubted, that Jesus regarded many forms of disease as cases of demoniac possession. Naturally, to the materialism which has from the earliest times reigned in schools of systematic medicine, this view will seem childish and absurd. It was, in fact, a hypothesis to account for certain observed facts, just as in our own days the presence of disembodied spirits is a theory brought forward by spiritualists to account for phenomena the true nature of which is not understood. It is probable that Jesus accepted the hypothesis as easily as he accepted the hypothesis that the sun moves round the earth. But he could not have accepted it unless he had regarded spirits of evil as constantly active in the world to tempt mankind and to oppose the children of light. I have in a previous chapter, in stating that men are tempted to evil, left open the question how far this fact may be accounted for by the principle of atavism, which our fathers would have called original sin. Here again, then, the Master only accepted a current theory as to the cause of a real fact. And it must be allowed that no inspiration of which we have any record in history has saved him who was inspired from false theories as to the causes of existing facts and tendencies.

Next may be eliminated the wonders recorded only in the Fourth Gospel. The author of that wonderful book is almost unsurpassed as a theologian. And in certain details of fact he seems to be more accurately informed than the Synoptists.

But his value as a witness is largely destroyed by the powerful prepossessions and very marked tendencies of his mind. A very great constructive thinker, he regards reported facts as mere material to be accepted or rejected as may suit the necessities of his doctrinal fabric. A thorough-going spiritualist, he would have imperfect understanding of the modern scientific passion for fact and evidence. To criticise from the historical point of view such narratives as that of the change of water into wine, or that of the raising of Lazarus, is to do them infinite injustice. It is like criticising a mediæval altar-piece by strict principles of optics, or condemning the great compositions of Paolo Veronese because the dress of his figures is not historically accurate.

On somewhat different grounds we may set aside the miracles of our Lord's childhood and youth. The only part of the life recorded by the Synoptists which can fairly claim a historical character begins with the calling of Peter and ends with the Crucifixion. We know from the apocryphal gospels how the fancy and piety of the early Christians delighted in embellishing the childish life of the Master with wonders of all kinds. The early chapters of the Third Gospel, though very superior to these in ethical and literary character, have a legendary air. But between the time when Jesus called his Apostles from their fishing and their affairs, and the time when he was condemned to the cross, we have a period the events of which must have been familiar to many witnesses, and may even now be to some extent recovered from their testimony.

In the Second Gospel, incomparably our most sober and trustworthy record, the historic career of Jesus is adorned by but three or four miracles properly so called: that is, deeds violating the order of nature as shown in the ordinary experience of mankind. These are, the stilling of a tempest at sea (iv. 39); the walking on the sea to the boat of the disciples (vi. 49); the feeding of multitudes, twice repeated (vi. 41, viii. 6); and the cursing of the fig tree, with its result (xi. 14). There are various ways in which the miraculous element may be eliminated from each of these stories without any violence of hypothesis. I do not care to attempt any such explanation,

because it seems to me that no particular explanation can reach more than a moderate degree of probability. What is quite certain is that any one of half-a-dozen explanations is more likely to represent the historic fact than an acceptance of the narrative as it stands in a perfectly literal and unimaginative fashion. The testimony of our anonymous historian, sensible and truthful as he usually is, is insufficient to overbalance the extreme historic improbability that the events took place precisely as he narrates them. He may reproduce a somewhat distorted account of things which really took place; he may have confused visions with waking realities; he may have taken for literal fact stories told as parables. In any case, history cannot accept his statements as they stand without treason against science and historic method.

It is a remarkable instance of the candour of the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, that they not only record the fact that Jesus did not work his mighty cures except where faith was present to receive the cure, but also preserve (*Mark* viii. 12) the remarkable saying of the Master, "There shall be no sign given unto this generation." The parallel passages<sup>1</sup> in the other two Gospels add, "but the sign of Jonah." And Luke gives an excellent explanation of the phrase, "as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation." The sign, that is, shall be preaching, like the warning teaching of Jonah in Nineveh. The interpretation given in *Matthew* is interesting, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This is obviously a later and less satisfactory explanation of the saying of the Master. And in fact the context in *Matthew*<sup>2</sup> more satisfactorily explains the reason why no sign was needed. Jesus appeals from the confirmation of his words by miracle to their confirmation by their accordance with spiritual laws. Changes in the sky foretell the weather, and the weather-wise learn to interpret those signs: in the same way those who understood the social

<sup>1</sup> *Luke* xi. 29; *Matt.* xvi. 4, cf. xii. 39.

<sup>2</sup> xvi. 1-4.

and religious phenomena of the time would need no miraculous warning to tell them that it was God's kingdom which was being proclaimed throughout Israel. In any case Jesus clearly repudiates the working of miracles such as the people longed for. Signs of a kind, such as strange cures of disease, he does seem to have given them: but he repudiated the rôle of the mere wonder-worker. Therefore in rejecting the literal truth of miraculous tales in the Gospel we follow the line clearly indicated by our Founder.

Three or four miracles, besides those already mentioned, are in the First and Third Gospels attributed to Jesus. To the walking on the sea, the First adds the perhaps allegorical story of Peter's attempt to pass over the sea to meet his Master; and in the same Gospel is found the story of the piece of money found in the fish's mouth by Peter. In the Third Gospel we find the marvellous (not necessarily miraculous) draught of fishes at the calling of Peter, and the healing of Malchus' ear, which Peter had cut off. This makes the list nearly or quite complete. And in all four of these cases we may notice one remarkable connecting fact. All the marvels belong to peculiarly Petrine episodes. There are also miraculous or semi-miraculous elements in our accounts of Peter's denial of his Lord, and in the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, for which he was the main authority. This takes us back to an observation to which we had already been led by a consideration of the *Acts*, that the person of Peter has a natural attraction for the miraculous. Why this should be, we are perhaps scarcely in a position to say. He was by nature impulsive and energetic, and by bringing up unlearned and ignorant; also the *Acts* represent him as a seer of visions in a trance (x. 10); and such a disposition would naturally go with a readiness to accept the miraculous on easy terms. Yet the Second Gospel, which tradition especially associates with Peter, is singularly free from miraculous story. There is here something difficult of explanation which may suggest that perhaps after all it was the Judæo-Christian following of Peter, rather than himself, which had a strong appetite for the marvellous.

The miracles connected in ordinary Christian thought with the Nativity and the Resurrection I reserve for treatment in

other chapters. The Transfiguration, of which some may think in this connection, cannot fairly be called a miracle. The testimony in regard to it is singularly unsatisfactory, the Apostles being, according to Luke, heavy with sleep, and their spokesman Peter dazed in mind. But if the testimony were ample, all that it could prove would be a vision, such as was common among the disciples in the days of the *Acts*.

We have already observed that the origin of many of the deeds recorded of Jesus in the Gospels must be sought sometimes in the circumstances and beliefs of the Græco-Roman world, and sometimes in passages of the Old Testament. The narratives of miraculous events are no exception to this general rule. We may briefly show this by the citation of one passage from a Roman historian, and one passage from the Hebrew annals.

We are informed by Tacitus<sup>1</sup> that when Vespasian was at Alexandria, two men suffering, one from a disease of the eyes and one from a crippled hand, approached him as suppliants, saying that the god Serapis had bidden them seek from him the cure of their respective diseases. Vespasian at first rejected their requests with a smile; but when they persisted, it appeared to him that possibly there might be some ground for their belief in a divine impulse, in rejecting which he might be guilty of impiety. Moreover, the physicians who examined the patients said that their condition was not such as absolutely to exclude cure under certain circumstances. Vespasian resolved, therefore, to make the trial. He anointed with spittle the eyes of the blind man, and put his foot on the diseased hand. In both cases healing immediately followed. A modern reader has no difficulty in accepting the narrative of Tacitus as having a basis of fact. Cures of this kind are anything but foreign to experience; yet they offer a close parallel to some of the cures recorded in the New Testament.

A miracle of a different kind is the miraculous feeding of the multitudes. Here there is no question of the power of faith on bodily condition, but of a physical multiplication of bread and meat. As it stands, the account of the miracle looks inexpugnable, and yet there are few who will not feel

<sup>1</sup> *Hist.* iv. 81.



that the position has been turned when they have read a few verses out of the life of Elisha,<sup>1</sup> "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people that they may eat: for thus saith the Lord, they shall eat and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." This narrative was familiar to those who wrote the Gospels, and it would make them ready to receive any report of similar miracles as wrought by Jesus. And in the traditions of the life of Mohammed, though he expressly in the Koran repudiates miraculous powers, several cases are recorded in which the Prophet is said to have fed multitudes on morsels of food. Far as the notion lies outside our modern horizon, it is clear that in ancient Syria the power to multiply food was regarded as a natural part of the equipment of a prophet. If, as a matter of fact, Jesus had been asked to perform such miracles, we can scarcely doubt that he would have made answer, as on a recorded occasion, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But that the spiritual teacher should, in the traditions, become a thaumaturgic magician was at the time a necessity. One of the most spiritual of Christians, Angélique Arnauld, immediately after a reputed miracle had been wrought in her convent, wrote thus to a friend,<sup>2</sup> "Do not desire, my dear sister, that God should deliver his truth by visible miracles, but by those invisible marvels of the conversion of hearts, which are done without rumour and noise." This is a saying which would, we may be confident, have been fully approved by the Founder of Christianity.

Most instructive is the gradual multiplication of miraculous stories as we go further and further from the fountain-head of Christian story, reaching a climax in the later Apocryphal Gospels. Most Christians feel a natural dislike to the com-

<sup>1</sup> 2 *Kings* iv. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Beard, *Port Royal*, i. 310.

parison of the phenomena of Christianity with those of other religions. Yet sometimes such comparison is very helpful, and it is so in the matter before us. Mohammed, like Jesus, was constantly urged to show some heavenly sign in confirmation of his mission. But he consistently disclaimed the power of working miracles, and declared that those who were insensible to the signs of God's working in the world of nature and of human experience would not be moved even if a special miracle were wrought. This at once reminds us of the saying attributed to Jesus, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead." Mohammed is said to have appealed to the Koran itself as a quite sufficient miracle; and here again we find a curious parallel to the saying of Jesus about Jonah and his preaching. It is, however, noteworthy that though in the Koran, which was in the hands of every pious Mohammedan, the founder of the religion of Islam declared that he could not work miracles, yet the natural tendencies of human nature were too strong to be resisted, and a crop of stories soon began to arise in which miraculous powers were attributed to him.

A still more remarkable parallel might be drawn, were this the place to do it, between the history of Christian miracle and the development of the mass of miraculous legends which gradually grew up round the life of Gautama in India. I need call attention to but two points. First, our knowledge of the teaching of Gautama is far more accurate than our knowledge of the events of his life. And, second, the nearer our texts are to the actual period with which they deal, the less prominent is the element of miracle, while the miracles actually recorded are of a less startling character, and more often mere embodiments of spiritual experience in symbolic language. We have but to substitute a greater name for that of Gautama, in order to read undeniable truth in regard to the origins of our own religion. I have already shown how the recorded history of St. Francis illustrates the same laws.

The defenders of miracles in our days usually take an *à priori* line. Some say that Jesus being what he was, it was natural that he should stand in an abnormal relation to nature,

and have unusual powers in regard to it.<sup>1</sup> Arguments of this kind are precisely those which historians regard with the utmost suspicion. It is impossible wholly to banish pre-suppositions from history, but they must always be subjected to very severe scrutiny. Firstly, one does not see why a superiority to mankind of a moral and spiritual kind should confer extraordinary powers over inanimate nature. Power over men's thoughts and hearts, and so over their bodies, it would, according to all analogy, impart; but the power of suspending natural law is something of quite another kind. And, secondly, after all, the matter must be settled by evidence. And it is the simple truth to say that the evidence of actual miracle in the life of our Lord is so weak, that if we were beforehand certain that he would work miracles, we could not now ascertain what miracles he actually wrought.

Another school of theologians find in the unity of will between Jesus and his heavenly Father a reason why he should be able, using a divine prerogative, to make the forces of the outward world work in subordination to his mission of redemption. That there may be traced in human history a Providence which orders outward event in reference to human ends I fully maintain. But that Providence does not work by miracle; rather through the minds and hearts of men. The theologians of whom I speak would have been the first, had they been contemporaries of Jesus, to demand signs from him. The point of view of Jesus seems to have been the opposite to this. He came, not as a wonder-working master of the visible world, but in order to do the will of Him that sent him, whether that will was revealed in the order of the visible world, or in the inner recesses of the heart. "Not my will but thine be done" was the burden of his life.

Two of the best attested miracles of the life of our Lord, using the word miracle strictly, are the drowning of the Gadarene swine and the destruction of the barren fig-tree. These are found in all the Synoptic Gospels. But these miracles are destructive, not beneficent. Would it really help any Christian to feel sure that the record of them was absolutely correct, or would it hurt any Christian to think

<sup>1</sup> Cf. especially Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 44.

that that record arose out of misunderstandings? Yet if the question be, as almost all theologians now admit, one of evidence, these miracles must be accepted among the first. They are the main basis on which Christianity rests, if the claims of Christianity rest on the historical evidence for miracles. Surely this is a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is the moral miracles of Christianity, and not these materialist legends, which prove the divine source of the religion.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE BIRTH AT BETHLEHEM

IT was quite natural that when the earliest disciples began the process of idealising their Master, they should first of all have placed round his life a setting of miracle. The Jews sought after marvels as the Greeks after wisdom. In the Gospels we find abundant traces of the craving for supernatural signs which marked the race and the time. The Apostles did not seek merely to establish their Master's close relation to his heavenly Father, by setting forth the devotion of his life and the divineness of his teaching, but to raise him on a pedestal of marvels. Frequently in his lifetime Jesus had sternly rebuked this tendency. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it." And St. Paul uses words very similar, "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified." The time was fast coming when the wisdom or philosophy of the Greeks was to run riot in the development of views of the nature of Jesus: but meantime the longing for signs was to have satisfaction in the nascent Church.

This Jewish passion for miracle was essentially materialist. And naturally materialism strongly marks the miraculous setting of the Master's life. That the whole life and doctrine of Jesus was a moral miracle by no means satisfied his followers. They must have physical miracles. Especially the birth and the death of Jesus must be raised by a setting of miracle into a world apart. Thus importance attached to the tale of the Virgin-birth and the tale of the Resurrection of



the Body, with which the Gospel narrative begins and ends.

The miraculous character of the birth of Jesus is of course a matter which does not admit of proof or of disproof, but it may be maintained either on historic or doctrinal grounds. It is necessary here to discuss it briefly in both aspects.

As regards historic grounds it may be shown :

(1) That the narratives in which the birth is spoken of are, as historic documents, very unsatisfactory.

(2) That the tale of a miraculous birth was not generally accepted by the first Christians.

(3) That the tale would have arisen, in all probability, whether true or not.

The first point, that the Gospel accounts of the circumstances of the birth of Jesus can establish no claim to be regarded as historical in any objective sense of the word, may be made clear without much difficulty. The narrative in *Matthew* is briefer, that in *Luke* more ample and poetical; but neither will stand the test of modern historic criticism.

When one compares the two narratives together, one finds not only that they come from different sources, but that they are inconsistent one with the other. According to *Matthew*, Joseph and Mary dwell at Bethlehem, where Jesus is born : immediately on the birth comes the visit of the eastern sages ; after that, Joseph flies with his family into Egypt to escape the massacre of infants by Herod, and thence after a while returns and settles at Nazareth, apparently for the first time, in order that a prophecy may be fulfilled. According to *Luke*, Joseph and Mary dwell at Nazareth, and come up to Bethlehem to fulfil the conditions of a Roman census : Jesus is born at Bethlehem, and there visited by shepherds, after which the family at once returns to Nazareth.

The narrative of *Matthew* is built up of fulfilment of prophecy, which we know to have been a very usual material for the construction of ideal history. The star which went before the magi, and stood over the inn, was no material phenomenon, but the star which should come out of Jacob ;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No doubt other elements were mingled in. When one of the Grand Lamas of Thibet dies his disciples "know that he will soon reappear, being born in the

the massacre by Herod is a reflection of the voice from Rama, Rachel weeping for her children; the flight into Egypt has as its motive the text, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Dreams come in repeatedly to determine or to explain action. And it is impossible to suppose that Herod would have ordered a general massacre of children, when, according to the story, it was the easiest thing in the world to discover the child who was really dangerous. He had only to send one of his numerous spies to follow the sages.

The narrative in *Luke* is of a very different character, a delightful pastoral full of noble canticles, which has been compared on good authority to the Psalms of Solomon. It is a triple story with a regular refrain at i. 80, ii. 40, and ii. 52.<sup>1</sup> The multitude of the heavenly host which appeared to the shepherds finds a parallel in the crowd of gods and sons of gods who thronged to see the newborn Buddha, and sang over his cradle how evil is banished and joy increased in the whole world, since a master of salvation is born.<sup>2</sup> The whole narrative has an air familiar to those acquainted with the birth-stories of heroes. At the same time it is from the ethical and religious point of view as superior to these, as the Bible is superior to other religious books.

It is true that the writer makes some attempt at chronological and historical accuracy in his narrative. But that attempt will certainly not bear criticism.

According to the narrative in the Third Gospel, the birth of Jesus took place in the reign of Herod the Great, and at the time of office of Quirinius. The historic facts appear to be the following: Herod died in B.C. 4, and was succeeded on the throne of Judæa by his son Archelaus, who reigned some ten years. On the expulsion of Archelaus, Judæa was placed under the rule of Quirinius, Governor of Syria, who made a census

form of an infant. If at this time they see a rainbow, they take it as a sign sent by the departed Lama to guide them to his cradle. . . . When at last they find the child they fall down and worship him."—Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, i. 43.

<sup>1</sup> Each of these three verses records how a child grew in wisdom and the favour of God.

<sup>2</sup> Seydel, *Das Evangelium von Jesu in seinen Verhältnissen zur Buddha Sage*, p. 137. So at the birth of a king in Egypt, there was jubilation in heaven.

about A.D. 7.<sup>1</sup> The ingenuity of conservative commentators has been taxed to the utmost to reconcile the story of the Gospels with historic fact. But how vain their efforts have been may be judged by any educated reader of works like that of Schürer, with whom Mommsen and Gardthausen agree. Quirinius was not Governor of Syria while Herod was King. It is more than doubtful if a census would have been carried out in a nominally independent state like that governed by Herod. And, had there been a census, there would have been no need for Joseph to go to Bethlehem to be registered, since citizens were registered at their place of domicile, not at the home of their ancestors. Nor even had Joseph made the journey would Mary have accompanied him.<sup>2</sup>

Schürer concludes his excursus with the remark, "All ways of escape are closed, and there remains nothing but to acknowledge that the evangelist has made his statement trusting to imperfect information, so that it is not in accordance with the facts of history." We cannot, however, do justice to the writers of a past age unless we endeavour to adopt their point of view. Probably Luke was not misled by imperfect information, but in his endeavour to grasp what he considered a greater truth sacrificed a lesser truth. To our thinking chronology is the backbone of history. But the dominant fact in the minds of the writers of the Gospels was that Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore must in his life have conformed to the prophecies referred to the Messiah. He must have been born in Bethlehem, because it was written, "Out of thee (Bethlehem) shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." That being the case, Luke was probably led to accept a current fable, by whom originated we shall never know, that the parents of Jesus went from Nazareth, where they were known to live, to Bethlehem, on the occasion of the census. The census was an institution much hated and little understood by the Jews, and it is but natural that their minds should be ill-informed as to its exact nature. The tale of the census was

<sup>1</sup> My authority is Schürer, whose masterly discussion of the whole subject can now be read in English, "*The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*," div. i. vol. ii. pp. 105-143.

<sup>2</sup> In the note at the end of this chapter I have briefly discussed some recent attempts to defend the historic value of Luke's story.

the most plausible explanation current of a thing that *must* have taken place. No doubt the writers of the Gospels thought the accordance of their life of Jesus with religious necessities far more important than its accordance with recorded fact of history.

And if we find the testimony of the Evangelists thus of a subjective rather than of an objective character, when they deal even with the time and the place of the birth of Jesus, this is sure to be the case in a still higher degree when they speak of his miraculous origin. This obviously could not be established by testimony, but was essentially a matter of ideal history. This assertion of miraculous origin seems to be based mainly on a verse of *Matthew* (i. 20): a verse which has an appropriate place among warning dreams and heavenly signs. The authority is an angel who appears to Joseph when he is asleep, and the motive is the fulfilment of a misunderstood and misinterpreted prophecy of Isaiah.

Certainly the early chapters of *Matthew* and *Luke* furnish proof that the story of the miraculous birth took its rise early. But it was not the only explanation of the divine character of the Founder which circulated in the early Church. It had various rivals which it only by slow degrees ousted.

Professor Harnack writes:<sup>1</sup> "The birth of Jesus of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary certainly had no place in the oldest preaching. That preaching began with Jesus Christ, son of David according to the flesh, son of God according to the spirit (*Rom.* i. 3), perhaps with the baptism of Christ by John and the descent of the Spirit upon him. Compared therefore with the first preaching, the omission from the Apostles' Creed of the Davidic Sonship, the baptism, and the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, and the substitution for these of the birth from the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary is an innovation."<sup>2</sup> Of course, however, when we use the word

<sup>1</sup> *Das Apostol. Glaubensbekenntniss*, 25th edit. p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Some early variant readings in *Matthew* and *Luke* seem to belong to a time in which the virgin-birth was not generally acknowledged. For instance, the early Syrian version of the Codex Sinaiticus reads at *Matt.* i. 16, "Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus." And some early texts of *Luke* iii. 22, wherein the baptism of Jesus by John is described, read, "A voice came from heaven which said, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee."

innovation in this connection we must do so with caution, since the story of the virgin-birth was certainly widely spread in the Church before the end of the first century.

The Gospel of Mark is almost universally allowed to be the earliest of the Gospels. Not only does the writer omit all mention of the virgin-birth, but beginning his work with the baptism of John, he uses the very significant phrase, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Also he records sayings and doings which cannot be reconciled with belief in a supernatural birth. For example, he says<sup>1</sup> that at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus his mother and his brethren sought to restrain him as one out of his mind. Now it seems almost impossible that Mark can have represented the mother of Jesus as doubting of his mission, if he accepted the tale of the miraculous birth.

The author of the Fourth Gospel appears to have known of the story of the virgin-birth. Indeed, at the time when he wrote, it must have been known generally. But he seems to have slighted it, and preferred another view, which cannot but be regarded as more spiritual. He holds that in Jesus the Word of God was incarnate. But some of his phrases seem directed against the theory of a miraculous birth. He writes, "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." And again he represents Jesus as explaining to the Jews the nature of his divine sonship in the words, "Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said I am the son of God?" But it is in the discourse to Nicodemus that the writer is most explicit. There he puts in the mouth of Jesus a statement of a high law which is fatal to the acceptance of a virgin-birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." Every man who would enter into life must be born again from above, *ἄνωθεν*. It seems to me impossible that a writer who thus pointedly contrasts the flesh and the spirit can have accepted a miraculous origin for the body of his Master. Indeed, as we shall presently see, the Logos doctrine of the Fourth Evangelist is clearly meant as an alternative for the miraculous birth. He gives up the

<sup>1</sup> iii. 21-35.



Jewish marvel for the Greek wisdom, ideal history for doctrine.

The view of St. Paul is quite as clearly and definitely stated in his Epistles. To him Jesus was the son of God according to the spirit, but according to the flesh the son of David. This sonship to David is asserted in various places in the Gospels and Epistles; and it implies descent from Joseph, since Joseph was maintained by early Christianity to have been a descendant of David, while the descent of Mary was not known or not regarded. Paul seems not even to have heard of the story of the miraculous birth. Had he known of it, he would probably, with his passion for knowing Christ not after the flesh, but after the spirit, have vigorously attacked it, and prevented it from ever emerging from the cycle of fanciful accounts of the childhood of Jesus, amidst which it originated, to become part of the recognised Christian creed.<sup>1</sup>

Among moderns, Dr. H. A. W. Meyer, a very moderate theologian, writes:<sup>2</sup> "Rightly have Mark and John excluded these miraculous events from the Gospel narrative, which began with the appearance of the Baptist, seeing that Jesus himself never, even in the circle of his trusted disciples, refers to them; while the disbelief of his brethren (*John* vii. 5) and the conduct of Mary (*Mark* iii. 21) cannot be reconciled with them."

It must next be shown that the tale of the miraculous birth, even if it were not true, would have been produced by the working of ordinary human tendencies under the conditions of the ancient world.

It would have been strange indeed if phenomena, which in popular belief always marked the birth of a heaven-sent personality, had been wanting in this case. The following quotation from Mr. Rhys Davids' little book on Buddhism<sup>3</sup> scarcely needs comment: "From Gautama's perfect wisdom, according to Buddhist belief, his sinlessness would follow as a matter of course. He was the first and the greatest of the Arahats. As a consequence of this doctrine, the belief soon

<sup>1</sup> What view Paul and the Fourth Evangelist really held in regard to the origin of their Master's divine nature will be further considered in the chapter on Baptism (Chap. XXXV.)

<sup>2</sup> *Comment. on Luke*, i. 5-38.

<sup>3</sup> P. 182.

sprang up that he could not have been, that he was not, born as ordinary men are; that he had no earthly father; that he descended of his own accord into his mother's womb from his throne in heaven; and that he gave unmistakable signs, immediately after his birth, of his high character and of his future greatness. Earth and heaven at his birth united to pay him homage; the very trees bent of their own accord over his mother, and the angels and archangels were present with their help. His mother was the best and the purest of the daughters of men, and his father was of royal lineage." Almost every word of this passage applies as well to Jesus as to Gautama.

Any one at all well acquainted with the facts of anthropology will be aware that in this matter, as in many others, Buddhism does but continue and develop a habit common among primitive peoples.<sup>1</sup> Wherever we make inquiry, in Peru or in India, in New Zealand or Canada, we find that the heroes who brought the tribes higher civilisation or improved ways of living were of divine origin. Sometimes both parents are divine; more often the mother is human and the father divine. The sons of God see the daughters of men that they are fair, and the result is a race of heroes. This is merely a way of piety among barbarians, who recognise in dim and halting fashion that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."

There are various ways of regarding these stories in relation to the birth of Jesus. We may consider them, as did Justin Martyr, as the imitations of sublime truth by demons who caricature divinely ordained events as the magicians of Egypt by their enchantments copied the marvels of Moses. Or we may regard them as local and partial adumbrations of a great truth fully revealed in Christianity. Or we may regard them as unripe fruit of the same tree of human nature of which the birth stories of Christianity are the most perfect production.

Perhaps a nearer parallel to the birth stories of Christianity than can be found either in Greek or Hebrew records may be discovered in a remarkable series of legends which clustered about the birth of Augustus, giving him as a father not Octavius,

<sup>1</sup> On the whole question see Hartland, *The Story of Perseus*.

but Apollo. The Romans were not an imaginative race, and Augustus stands out in the full blaze of historic light: yet Suetonius<sup>1</sup> has preserved for us a series of stories as to the conception and infancy of the Emperor which offer quite a startling analogy to those recorded in *Matthew* and *Luke*.

A prophecy misunderstood had determined the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, "Out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel." We are told that of old the wall of Velitræ had been struck by lightning, and that it had been on that occasion prophesied that out of Velitræ should come a mighty ruler. The Octavian family to which Augustus belonged came from Velitræ.

Herod, on hearing from the mages of the birth of the Messiah, took violent measures to destroy him. Before the birth of Augustus an omen had taken place at Rome showing that nature was preparing a king for the Roman people. The Senate, we are told, in alarm decreed that no child of that year should be reared, but the decree was, by interested senators, kept out of the archives and frustrated.

Even for the episode of Simeon and Anna there is a parallel. On the day of Augustus' birth his father Octavius came late to the Senate House, and one Nagidius, on hearing what cause had delayed him, at once prophesied that a master of the world was born.

Also the visit to the temple by Jesus in his twelfth year may be compared with the tale that Augustus as an infant was missed from his cradle, and found on the top of a tower facing the rising sun, the embodiment of Apollo his father.

Whether any of these tales as to Augustus had any foundation in fact we do not know. The historian is content to take them as tales, and he well knows that if there were no portents at the birth of so great a ruler, in the opinion of the time there ought to be, and they must spring up, none knows how, in the general consciousness of the race.

The tendency of the early Church to entwine with miracle the birth of the Founder by no means rested content with the tale of the Virgin-Birth. The earlier chapters of Luke in particular almost belong to, at least lead on to, a great mass of

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, *Octavianus*, c. 94.

early Christian literature dealing with the early years of Jesus and with his mother's life in a vein of exaggerated thaumaturgy. The *Gospel of St. Thomas* represents Jesus as from his cradle a worker of miracles. "He kills his comrades, changes them into goats, blinds their parents, confounds his teachers, proving to them that they do not understand the mysteries of the alphabet; compels them to ask his pardon. People fly from him as from a plague; Joseph in vain begs him to desist."<sup>1</sup> Tasteless and materialist exaggerations of this kind were so grateful to the Christian feeling of the second and third centuries, that the Apocryphal Gospels which contained them in many quarters superseded the more sober and spiritual narratives of Matthew and Mark. The *Gospel of the Infancy* passed in the Far East as the work of Peter and as the Gospel *par excellence*.

And by a natural transition, the lovers of the marvellous passed on from the life of Jesus to that of Mary. The so-called *Proterangel of James* tells how she was born of aged parents, her birth being preceded by an Annunciation like that spoken of by Luke. Her marriage was accompanied by miracle. Later works tell how at every step of her life the divine power was interfering with the ordinary course of nature for her benefit. Even the infancy of her mother Anne is adorned with the fantastic broidery of a thaumaturgic imagination.

These gospels had an immense vogue. And it is to them that Christian art owes the greater part of its subjects. To this Greece offers a ready parallel. Greek painting and sculpture were inspired far less by the lofty poems of Homer than by the imitative works of the Cyclic poets. So Christian art goes for its subjects not to *Mark* and the *Acts*, but to the first chapters of *Luke*, the Apocryphal Gospels and the spurious *Acts of the Apostles*. It was, however, not only artists and the common people who gladly received this cycle of works, but grave Christian doctors like Epiphanius and Gregory of Nyssa. Mr. Cruttwell writes,<sup>2</sup> "There was an immense number of such stories current, some exquisitely beautiful, some grotesque,

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *L'Église Chrétienne*, p. 514.

<sup>2</sup> *Literary History of Early Christianity*, i. 176.

others superstitious and childish; but all so suited to the popular taste that the Church, being unable to compete with them, adopted the sagacious course of recasting, expurgating, and adopting them." The sagacity of this course cannot be denied. But if the Church thus adapted history to popular needs, what becomes of the authority of the Church as a guarantee of sober fact of history?

The miraculous birth and the thaumaturgic infancy of Jesus are accepted in the Koran. It is there narrated how the child yet in the cradle vindicates his mother's honour and performs a variety of tasteless marvels. So slight is the connection between the Christianity of the heart and the miraculous background of the Master's birth! Mohammed accepts that background; Paul and John reject it. But it may be expected of a critic who maintains the ideal origin of the tale of the miraculous birth, that he should more definitely indicate in what Christian circles he supposes it to have arisen. It does not seem to have arisen among the family of Jesus. To them the genealogic lists may be due, but not what follows and is inconsistent with those lists. Nor did the tale arise among the Gentile and Pauline churches. The narratives in which it is set forth are thoroughly Hebrew in thought and language. But though the mass of Judaising Christians traced the descent of Jesus from David, and disallowed the miraculous birth, it is likely that the opposite tendency prevailed here and there among them. Precisely in what circle the tale of the superhuman birth arose will probably never be known. It seems not impossible that it may have originated, like its rival the logos doctrine, in the fertile soil of Alexandrian Judaism. The story of the flight into Egypt occurs in Matthew's Gospel in close proximity to the story of the birth at Bethlehem. Both may owe their origin to some group of pious Alexandrian Jews. It was an ancient custom in Egypt to maintain as a matter of ideal history, one may almost say as a matter of doctrine, that many of the kings were directly born of the sun-god. Maspéro says of Alexander the Great that he went to Egypt as son of Philip, and returned as the son of God.<sup>1</sup> The Alexandrians strangely

<sup>1</sup> Maspéro, *Comment Alexandre devint dieu*.



mingled Egyptian religious notions with Greek philosophy and Jewish beliefs. It does not seem unlikely that they may have combined the Egyptian doctrine of the divine parentage of great kings with Jewish prophecies such as that in Isaiah, "Behold a virgin shall conceive." This phrase has in the Septuagint a somewhat different meaning from what it has in the Hebrew, and the Jews of Alexandria were accustomed to interpret the Old Testament, as they interpreted Homer and Plato, in very fanciful fashion. Of course this view does not pretend to be more than a conjecture.

I think I may now claim to have established the contentions with which I set out, that the birth tales in *Matthew* and *Luke* are historically unsatisfactory, that they were not generally accepted by the first Christians, and that, true or not, such tales might naturally have arisen.

But of course it does not hence follow that the story of the birth *cannot* be true, even historically. There may be strong practical grounds for accepting it as a piece of history, not indeed guaranteed by ordinary evidence, but certified by authority, or necessary to explain the facts of the history of the Church. This necessitates our passing for a short time and with very cautious steps from the ground of history to that of doctrine. It may be safely said that very few in our days would have accepted the miraculous birth on merely historic grounds. Most Christians who receive it do so on grounds of doctrine. Being outside history properly so-called, it is especially adapted for being accepted as a matter of ideal history, if there be good practical reasons for such acceptance.

It must be allowed, in accordance with principles already laid down, that the teaching of the virgin-birth would not have gained the position which it has held in the history of Christianity, if it had not stood for truth of some kind. It is likely that those who in the early centuries of Christianity held to it were less in the wrong, on the whole, than those who rejected it. But, in my opinion, it will be necessary for the present generation to reconsider many of the beliefs of which this may be said. Of course it is useless to argue with those who accept the virgin-birth on the authority of Scripture as such, or on the authority of the Church. But I would

venture, with all diffidence, to defend the view that it is not the highest Christian teaching.

It was a somewhat crude attempt to explain the nature of the Founder. As such it naturally partakes of the materialism which he seems to have constantly rebuked. A woman once in his presence exclaimed, as we are told,<sup>1</sup> "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." Any one who holds the tenet of the virgin-birth would necessarily feel that she was expressing a most exalted truth. Yet it would seem that something in the expression displeased Jesus, and he answered, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." The teaching of Paul and of the Fourth Evangelist is also, as I have already maintained, inconsistent with the tenet. M. Réville observes that, "*Entre la notion du logos préexistant qui s'incarne dans un homme, qui s'impose une telle tâche sachant et voulant ce qu'il fait, et la notion de la conception à jour fixe d'un être nouveau n'acquérant une personnalité distincte qu'au moment de son entrée dans la vie humaine, il n'y a pas de commune mesure.*" Finally, to many thoughtful minds, the acceptance of the tenet of the virgin-birth seems to reduce the whole human life of the Founder to a kind of mirage, to paint it with colours "which never were on sea or land," to deprive the Christian of real human relationship to his Master.

One feels disposed to regret, though the regret probably only shows imperfect knowledge of circumstance, that an earlier and rival view did not prevail over that of the virgin-birth. There was a theory of which there are clear traces in our Gospels, and which was accepted in the earliest teaching, that the Holy Spirit became first united with Jesus at the time of his baptism by John. The stories of the descending dove, of the Temptation, and of the first proclamation of the Gospel, all hang together and seem to denote what Mark terms the "beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." If, with Mark, the Christian Church had from the first accepted this as the beginning, it seems to a modern fancy that it would have been better. But human tendencies must have their way in history. It was necessary that a beginning of the life of Jesus suitable

<sup>1</sup> *Luke xi. 27.*

for adornment by legend and by art should arise. And because that was necessary we are involved in difficulties, and have to choose between the acceptance of unhistoric miracles and the rejection of the teaching of early (though not the earliest) Christianity. In human history, as in nature, among the most usual sources of pain and disease is the survival of institutions and beliefs which were once necessary to progress, but have ceased to be so.

It is to me a matter of regret to have to speak so strongly on a subject which, in the minds of a large proportion of Christians, is wrapped up in religious awe. And, in accordance with views elsewhere expressed, I am quite ready to allow that this particular doctrine may in the minds of many occupy such a place that it cannot be ejected without causing the downfall of a whole structure of religious belief. It is of the very nature of illusion that those who discern it to be illusion are often less in the right than those who accept it as true. I have not the least wish to persuade any Christians of this class. It is not for them that I have written.

But a searching examination of this article of the creed appears to me quite necessary. I am convinced from observation of what has happened in Prussia, where in 1846 the Church Synod rejected this tenet, and from what is going on among ourselves, that this particular view is absolutely doomed by the progress of historic research. It is like a spar which has been riddled with shot, and the wisest as well as the most honest plan is to try to rid the ship of its weight. And the tenet is not, either from the historical or the logical point of view, the basis of the worship of the divine Son, but rather of the worship of the Virgin Mother.

## NOTE

### MR. GORE AND PROFESSOR RAMSAY ON THE BIRTH

Recently, in his *Dissertations*, Mr. Gore has re-discussed this matter, and tried to defend the current view. All critics are at one in acknowledging the candour and sincerity of the writer. But a good deal of his argument admits of a complete reply.

I should not complain of Mr. Gore for not arguing the matter on purely historic grounds. For, of course, from the strictly historic point of view there is no evidence as regards the virgin-birth, nor indeed in the nature of the case could there be any satisfactory objective evidence. Those who should examine the actual facts not as Christians, but as historical inquirers merely, would find that it lay outside their scope. But it seems to me that Mr. Gore can be blamed for mixing up in many instances doctrinal with historic arguments. Unless these are kept apart, we cannot lay either clearly before the mind.

Mr. Gore thinks it more likely that the virgin-birth was a historic fact than that a belief in it, if unhistoric, should have arisen among early Christians. The one is confessedly a miracle : the other then, presumably, is a greater miracle. I have tried to show that the rise of the belief, far from being supernatural, was almost inevitable. He thinks that an acceptance of a physically supernatural origin of Jesus is a necessary part of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Here again I differ completely. But I do not propose to discuss these matters with Mr. Gore. There is, however, one ground on which we can meet, and that is the meaning and history of the early Christian documents of the New Testament.

Mr. Gore takes the birth-narratives of Matthew and Luke as serious history, regarding the putative father and the mother of Jesus as responsible for them respectively. And he holds it possible "to account for the silence of St. Mark, St. John, and St. Paul, so far as it is a fact, while at the same time indicating evidence which goes to show that these writers did in reality recognise the fact of the virgin-birth."

If this position were defensible, Mr. Gore would have a shadow of a case. Of course he could not hope actually to demonstrate the historic character of the virgin-birth, but he could at all events prove that the earliest Christians were unanimous in accepting it, and that such acceptance lay near the foundations of the faith.

But the position is not defensible. I have shown, or tried to show, in the last chapter : (1) that the writer of the Fourth Gospel probably knew of the story of the virgin-birth, and rejected it ; (2) that Paul probably did not know of it, but rejected it by anticipation ; (3) that in the Synoptic Gospels there are many passages inconsistent with it ; and (4) that the passages of Matthew and Luke which give the story are so full of improbabilities and so mixed with marvels that it is impossible to regard them as serious historical documents.

We have here questions of historic and literary criticism which can be fairly argued, on principles ascertained and in general use in

all historic schools. They are not theological questions, but such as every student of history has to take up every day. And I would ask the reader accustomed to the historic discussion of the texts of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Suetonius, whether the views in my text or Mr. Gore's are most in accordance with ordinary canons of criticism. When men are discussing doctrinal questions they may be excused for using philosophic and theological arguments. But Mr. Gore's assertions as to our historic documents must either be accepted on authority or else discussed on ordinary critical and historic grounds.

I will give a few specimens of Mr. Gore's manner of arguing, to show that among his many talents and intellectual virtues we cannot include historic imagination or a mastery of historic method.

Take the following (p. 13): "We cannot conceive that period immediately following the resurrection passing without inquiry, systematic inquiry, into the circumstances of our Lord's birth." Mr. Gore stands just in the position taken up by Paley in the last century, before the birth of modern criticism. The question is not what we should do under certain circumstances, but what the earliest Christians would do. And to suppose that they would at such a time occupy themselves with, or care about, historic proofs is to set aside all our evidence. It is no doubt true that in the early Church there was a desire to hear the testimony of eye-witnesses of the deeds and the words of the Master, and that this was one main cause of the great respect which attached to the Apostles. Writers like Papias were very anxious to attach a chain of tradition between themselves and Jesus. Notwithstanding, we know in what a wonderful way the deeds of the Master were developed for subjective reasons. And in such a matter as the circumstances of the birth there is no indication of a serious search for fact; nor were the peasantry of Judæa and Galilee in the least degree trained in the principles of historic search and the methods of judging of evidence.<sup>1</sup> Only one man among the first generation of Christians is really known to us: St. Paul. Did he, after his conversion, make "systematic inquiry into the circumstances of our Lord's birth"? Let him answer for himself. "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." "I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." To suppose that people of that age and

<sup>1</sup> As Renan well says, "La curiosité objective, qui ne se propose d'autre but que de savoir aussi exactement que possible la réalité des faits, est une chose dont il n'y a presque pas d'exemple en orient."—*Les Évangiles*, p. 90.



that country cared about the pedantry of historic research is to mistake the conditions of the problem before us.

Or take a writer of the next generation, the author of the *Clementine Epistle to the Corinthians*. He regards the resurrection of Jesus Christ as one great pledge of the resurrection of all believers. According to Mr. Gore he should have made diligent inquiries into the evidence for that resurrection as historic fact. Did he do so? It is hardly likely. For he relies with equal confidence on the periodical miracle of the resurrection of the phoenix of Arabia, the pious bird that buries its father. To him then the Herodotean tale of the phoenix is sober fact. Does not this observation suggest that the tests of historic truth were not quite the same for the fathers of early Christianity as they are for us?

If we suppose the story in *Luke* to be historic, we must accept the wildest improbabilities, not to say impossibilities. If we suppose it to be a theory, in a moment it falls into line with all our knowledge, and a dozen parallels are forthcoming. Few in our day would regard it as historic but for the wish to supply a historic basis for the doctrine of the Incarnation. If this be so, the really straightforward course is not to mix up into an incongruous whole doctrinal necessities and historic criticisms, but to retain the doctrine of the Incarnation, and yet to allow that the virgin-birth cannot be admitted into the web of history, but stands outside it.

At p. 39 Mr. Gore observes that the genealogies of the Synoptists cannot be used to prove the belief in an actual descent of Jesus from Joseph, because they stand close to narratives of the virgin-birth. "If the Evangelists who put them there did not think they were incompatible with the virgin-birth, it cannot be argued that their original compilers did." Mr. Gore must be acquainted with the fact, one of the most familiar to all students of ancient history, that ancient compilers frequently insert in their narratives inconsistent accounts of one event taken from various sources. It is most probable that in our texts of *Matthew* and *Luke* the authors incorporated from one source the genealogy implying the descent from Joseph, and from another source the tale of the virgin-birth. How they reconciled them we know not; but this is precisely a difficulty which is continually meeting us in reading the works of the ancients. Their sense of inconsistency was not nearly so acute as ours has become.

One more instance may suffice. Mr. Gore observes (p. 31) that it is not improbable "that some oriental astrologers should have had their thoughts directed towards Jerusalem, and should have paid a visit there, under the attraction of some celestial phenomenon, to seek a heaven-sent king." Certainly it is not very

improbable; but that is not the question. The question is, what evidence there is of such having been the fact. If we turn to the narrative in *Matthew*, we find mention not of a "celestial phenomenon," but of a star which the astrologers saw in the east. It was not a conjunction of planets or a meteor, but a sign which went before the travellers and stood over where the young child was. Here again it is a question of evidence. And for the objective existence of a marvel of this kind, a historical inquirer needs something more than a statement set in such surroundings in an anonymous historical writing.

Later on (p. 67), Mr. Gore admits that his historical argument is guided by a purpose. To admit that the historic reality of the virgin-birth is doubtful "would be to strike a mortal blow at the authority of the Christian Church as a guide to religious truth in any real sense." It is rash to mix up religious or doctrinal truth thus with historic accuracy. If the two things be inseparable, then the authority of the Church is already lost. The Christian Church at first believed passionately in the near advent of her Lord. Historically, she was totally mistaken. She believed in the literal truth of the earlier chapters of *Genesis*, and used that belief as a basis of doctrine. If a theologian wishes to maintain the authority of the Church in matters of history his only logical course is to subscribe to Papal infallibility. Mr. Gore says that he cannot be accused of an uncritical or unhistoric disposition in dealing with history. But the answer is that it is not possible to deal with early Christian history critically, if we are determined to regard certain views of it as established by the authority of the Christian Church. Mr. Cruttwell, as we have seen, writes of the tales of the infancy, "The Church being unable to compete with them, adopted them." That phrase shows a far juster view than Mr. Gore's of the early Church's relation to history.

Mr. Gore is well acquainted with the manner in which ancient history is taught in our days. He knows with how much scepticism the statements of ancient historians are received; that they are judged not by the plausibility of their stories, but by considerations of evidence and analogy. The educated world has many quarrels as to the comparative value of authors, the facts of ancient history, and the like; but as to the general methods of historic investigation it is united. Berlin and Vienna, Paris and Florence, Oxford and Harvard, are in this matter at one. And those who are expected in future to accept as a fact of objective history the virgin-birth of Jesus must be kept away from this learned consensus, must be trained not in the breezy air of the Universities, but in the sheltered cloisters of theological academies. The Roman Church knows this well: is the Anglican Church prepared to follow its lead?

The doctrinal aspect of the virgin-birth I do not wish to discuss at any length. But the view taken in the present book seems to me as defensible on doctrinal as on historical grounds. I can imagine some one propounding the statement of the Creed to the Fourth Evangelist, and his crushing reply, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." I can imagine St. Paul replying, "Christ was the son of David after the flesh, but the Son of God after the spirit." And I do not doubt that the love of the miraculous which gave origin to the statement would have been wholly distasteful to the Founder of Christianity himself. In this case then, at least, I can find no reason to torture history in order to find a basis in it for a doctrine which is out of harmony with modern ways of thought.

Finally, I would suggest that if there be any doctrinal or theological justification of the story of the virgin-birth, the same justification exists also for the story of the immaculate nature of the Virgin. One can easily understand that in past days it might be held that the one doctrine rested on a historic basis which did not exist in the case of the other. But, as I conceive, the growth of historic criticism has invalidated this distinction, and left the two doctrines standing on one basis. Dr. Hort<sup>1</sup> long ago observed, "I have been persuaded for many years that Mary-worship and 'Jesus'-worship have very much in common in their causes and their results."

Since the above pages were written a little book by Professor W. M. Ramsay<sup>2</sup> has appeared, in which the question of the place of birth of Jesus has been argued afresh, and the credibility of Luke's narrative defended. Mr. Ramsay does not start from quite the same point as Mr. Gore. Having given close attention to the narrative in *Acts*, he regards the author of it as an exact historian, and is concerned to defend the same writer from the charge of untrustworthiness in the early chapters of the Third Gospel. What is still more to the point, Mr. Ramsay has new documents to cite which have some bearing on the census. His attempt is a piece of legitimate historical criticism. Personally, I should have been well pleased if he had made out his case. The setting up of historic fact by the aid of ancient documents recently discovered is a task with which I have strong sympathy.<sup>3</sup> But I do not think that Mr. Ramsay has proved his point.

His starting-point, the thorough credibility of Luke, will be conceded by few critics. Dr. Sanday remarks that he is too

<sup>1</sup> *Life of F. J. A. Hort*, ii. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* 1898.

<sup>3</sup> *New Chapters in Greek History*, Preface.

sanguine in regard to the accuracy of this writer. Renan goes further, and says of Luke, "Le vrai matériel n'est rien pour lui : l'idée, le but dogmatique et moral, sont tout."<sup>1</sup> And if in consequence of Mr. Ramsay's valuable researches in Asia Minor in regard to the *Acts*, we take some discount from Renan's saying, it is yet in the main the decision of criticism. Mr. Ramsay praises the literary quality in Luke's work, and quite rightly. But literary quality and exactness seldom go together. Any one who has to deal with Oxford undergraduates finds that a sense of style, accompanied by strict personal truthfulness, may go with an astonishing inability to judge of evidence or to discern degrees of probability. If Luke had had any sense of the canons of evidence, he would scarcely have written a history of Paul without any reference to Paul's Epistles, which were easily accessible.

I scarcely dare touch the arguments of Professor Ramsay. In any summary account of them one is sure to do them imperfect justice, and they are so delicate that a little rough handling might spoil their points. His main contentions are the following : Documentary evidence which has recently come to light in Egypt proves that an enrolment of the population of that country took place every fourteen years from the time of Augustus onwards. Such an enrolment would fall in the year B.C. 9. There are some indications that such a custom may have prevailed also in Syria. In the case of Palestine, reasons may be given why Herod should have postponed the enrolment to B.C. 7-6, in which year it is not improbable that Quirinius may have been, not Governor of Syria, but in the exercise of a military command there. The enrolment was a different institution from the Roman census or valuation : its main purpose being to ascertain the number of the population. If Herod made an enrolment, he may, to pacify Jewish feeling, have made it rather by tribes than by districts. Thus in the year of the nativity, which Professor Ramsay takes to be B.C. 6, an enrolment of the Jews by tribes may have been in progress, and Quirinius may at that time have held an important post in Syria.

In dealing with Professor Ramsay's views, we must clearly distinguish two things : the date and place of the birth, and the miraculous nature of the birth. It is only as regards the first of these that Mr. Ramsay tries to support the tale of Luke. If his contentions be allowed, the story of the virgin-birth still stands outside history. But even if one allows the fullest value to Mr. Ramsay's delicate structure of hypotheses and possibilities, it does not go far. It does not seem to me even to attempt to meet the main difficulties of the tale of Luke, such as Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and Mary's journey with him.

<sup>1</sup> *Les Évangiles*, p. 262.

It is in fact little more than the chronology of Luke that Mr. Ramsay tries to rescue, and that by substituting a most elaborate and intricate theory for the simple and obvious view accepted by such authorities as Mommsen and Schürer. And to defend Luke's chronology is of small avail, since, as Mr. Ramsay himself observes (p. 203), "Luke had little of the sense for chronology, the value of which, in clearly understanding or describing any series of incidents, had not been appreciated so early as the first century." In another place (p. 204) Mr. Ramsay writes, in words nearly agreeing with my own, "Abstract scientific interest in the chronology of the Gospel did not exist among his readers. What they were concerned with was its truth; and that was gathered from the Saviour's teaching, from his statements about himself." Mr. Ramsay has something of the historic imagination, which, in my opinion, Mr. Gore lacks, and his *obiter dicta* are of far more value than his main argument.

Mr. Ramsay sees clearly that his historic arguments must finally rest on a dogmatic substruction. "They only will accept" Luke's narrative, "who for other reasons have come to the conclusion that there is no adequate and rational explanation of the coming of Christianity into the world, except through the direct and 'miraculous' intervention of divine power." I hold as strongly as Mr. Ramsay that such intervention really took place. But this fact does not give special credibility to the tale of Luke any more than to the various views as to the birth held by Matthew or John or Paul, or any other early Christian writer.

The question which Mr. Ramsay sets before himself is, Was Christ born at Bethlehem? I apprehend the strictly correct answer to this question to be as follows: When and where the Christ was born is matter of doctrine, not history; but according to all historic probability Jesus of Nazareth was born at Nazareth.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

THE tale of the physical resurrection of Jesus belongs evidently to the same circle of thought as that of the miraculous birth. This tale also shows a love of the marvellous, is deeply tinged with materialism, and rests on a historical substruction which falls to pieces on a careful examination. That the disciples had an intense conviction that they had intercourse with their Master after his death cannot be doubted. And that this conviction was the salvation of mankind is also historic fact. But the story of the resurrection of the body of Jesus stands on quite another footing, and offers the greatest difficulty to any educated modern Christian. At the same time it must be allowed that the resurrection, when approached from the side of historic criticism, offers as great difficulties as when approached from the side of Christian belief. It is the crux of all restorations of the life of Jesus.

If we place side by side the accounts of the various appearances of Jesus to his disciples after the crucifixion we shall soon find that these accounts are not to be reconciled together by any ingenuity. It is evident that at the time when the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul were written there was a mass of floating legend on the subject, various parts of which commended themselves to various disciples. The account in *Mark* is the simplest and one of the most ancient. It is contained in the first eight verses of the sixteenth chapter, the remainder of that chapter being, as critics suppose, an addition. Here we have only a narration how the two Marys

went to the sepulchre early in the morning of the first day of the week, and found therein, in the place of the body of Jesus, a young man in a white robe who told them that Jesus had arisen and gone before them into Galilee. Quite inconsistent with this narrative, though equally simple and free from the marvellous, is the beginning of the twentieth chapter of the Fourth Gospel, which seems, like many historical portions of that Gospel, to be based on actual tradition. In that account we read how Mary Magdalene first reported the tomb empty, and how Peter and John ran in haste to the sepulchre, and finding it to be as she had said, went back to their own home; the first sight of angels and of the risen Lord appearing to Mary when she was left alone. Mary Magdalene, it should be observed, was a woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils, by which phrase we may probably understand that she was subject to nervous derangement: thus in a matter of visions her evidence would be of very little value. The great accretion of stories which are told in this connection by the other evangelists have not the same air of verisimilitude, nor are they to be reconciled together, or with the earliest account of the resurrection which we possess, that of St. Paul.

One of the most curious features of the accounts of the resurrection in the Gospels is the way in which the resurrection of the body is insisted on. It is true that the body of the risen Jesus passed through closed doors, but yet it retained most of the characters of the flesh. At the various appearances Jesus ate and drank; the disciples laid hold on his feet; Thomas not only saw but felt him, with all the wounds of his death still unhealed. And we are told that this body mounted in the sight of the faithful towards heaven, until a cloud received it out of their sight. Of course, at a time when body and spirit were, at all events in the minds of the uneducated, so imperfectly distinguished that continued life after death was supposed to imply the continued existence of the body; and at a time when heaven was popularly supposed to be an arch vaulted above our heads, where was the abode of God and the angels, such stories as these might well seem credible. But to us who know more accurately the distinction between body and spirit, and who have penetrated the secrets of space more

completely, they cannot but seem materialistic. Very often, instead of being a help to faith, a belief in the literal truth of the Christian tales of the resurrection is an impediment to it.<sup>1</sup>

Another notable point in the Gospel narratives is that the disciples who saw their risen Lord only recognised him after a time, and with difficulty. The disciples who went to Emmaus walked with him, and knew him not. Mary Magdalene supposed him to be the gardener. When Jesus appeared to the eleven in Galilee some of them doubted. When he spoke to them from the shore as they were fishing they did not for a while recognise him. We even find the remarkable phrase, "After that he appeared *in another form*<sup>2</sup> unto two of them." All this seems naturally to point to the gradual growth of a cycle of legend.

But amid the unsatisfactory details of the synoptic accounts of the resurrection we may cull a few facts which seem to be historic.

In the first place, it seems that the resurrection of their Master was wholly unexpected by the disciples. When women reported to the Apostles that they had seen the Lord, the story appeared to them but idle talk. And the Marys themselves had gone, early in the morning of the first day in the week, with spices in order to embalm the body of Jesus. Now, as M. Réville well observes,<sup>3</sup> "On n'embaume pas un corps dont on attend la résurrection d'un moment à l'autre." And the unexpectedness of the resurrection tells in more than one direction. It proves that Jesus cannot have foretold that resurrection, at all events in a manner intelligible to the Apostles. And it also proves that some actual experiences of fact must have taken place before the incredulous despair of the Apostles could be changed to confident belief. What were these experiences?

It is very doubtful if history will ever be able to answer that question. The two simplest accounts of the resurrection,

<sup>1</sup> The unsatisfactoriness of the accounts of the resurrection regarded from the historical point of view has been well set forth by Greg (*The Creed of Christendom*) and Macan (*The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*).

<sup>2</sup> Mark xvi. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus de Nazareth*, ii. 433.

those of Mark and John, centre notably in the empty grave. Hence M. Réville seems to have some justification for his statement,<sup>1</sup> "Le point de départ de toute discussion concernant la résurrection de Jesus, c'est donc le fait matériel que, le matin du dimanche qui suivit la crucifixion, le tombeau dans lequel son corps avait été déposé fut trouvé vide." Allowing this emptiness of the grave to be the central fact, it might be accounted for in various ways. Of course the disciples explained it by a physical resurrection; the Jews are reported to have said that the disciples had stolen the body. This last theory is a very inadequate way of accounting for the facts. A variant story, of which we find a trace in Tertullian, was that the gardener who held the garden around the tomb had removed the body of Jesus for fear of frequent visits of the Galileans. M. Réville thinks the last tale one not to be lightly thrown aside by historic research; but, of course, it will be highly repugnant to most modern Christians. The view that Jesus had not really died upon the cross, but merely fainted, has found some adherents among able critics. In my opinion the empty grave offers us a problem which objective history can never solve.

It was believed by the first disciples, howsoever the belief may have arisen, that their Lord was not removed from them by death, but remained among them, to guide and to aid. That being the case, it was inevitable that they should also see him with outward eyes. The belief necessarily found for itself an external manifestation. And by the same inevitable necessity the character of the appearances of the risen Master was determined by the existing beliefs of the disciples. They were not Greeks, but Jews, and therefore the appearance of the spirit of their Master without corporeal embodiment would not be possible. At the time they expected a resurrection in the flesh, and therefore they held that a resurrection in the flesh had taken place, in spite of such phenomena as that the Master appeared among them when the doors were shut.

When we turn to Paul's story of the resurrection we breathe a purer air. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus de Nazareth*, ii. 453.

at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul was, as we know, not strongly interested as to the facts of the life of his Master. But in this particular matter of the resurrection he does profess to receive his account not from direct revelation to himself, but from the tradition of the early disciples. On the whole his narrative is not merely the earliest that we have, but the most trustworthy. We may note a few points in regard to it. First, that he regards Peter as the first witness. We have already seen in what curious fashion miracles tend to cling about the person of Peter. Second, that he says nothing of the circumstances of the appearances, except that, generally speaking, he places them on the same footing as the appearances of Jesus to himself. The materialism of the open wounds is here altogether wanting. Paul fully grasps the truth that the essential fact of the resurrection is the presence of the spirit of Jesus among his disciples, and that in this, as in other cases, “the flesh profiteth nothing.”

But does not Paul himself, an objector may say, declare that if Christ be not risen our faith is vain? Certainly he does. But by the resurrection of Christ Paul means primarily the spiritual resurrection. “It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” No doubt Paul also believed in the physical resurrection of Christ, just as he also believed in the physical resurrection, though in a changed and spiritual body, of all the dead; and this remnant of materialism still clinging to his pure spirituality ruins for idealists the sublime rhetoric of the fifteenth chapter of the First Corinthian Epistle. But how subordinate in his beliefs the material resurrection was in comparison with the spiritual appears earlier in that same chapter, in which he places the appearance of Christ to himself on precisely the same level as the appearance to Peter and to James. We may fairly say with St. Paul, “Unless Christ be risen, the Christian faith is vain,”

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 5.



if, with him, we mean by the rising of Christ the spread of his power in the hearts of men, and his continued inspiration of the Church.

The same divergence of testimony which marks the Synoptic accounts of the physical resurrection marks also the accounts of the events which followed. According to Matthew, the eleven went almost at once to a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had promised to meet them, and there worshipped him, though, as we are told, some doubted. According to Luke, the eleven were expressly told to remain in Jerusalem until they should receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and they obeyed the injunction. Now if any fact would seem to be matter of sober history, it is the fact that the Apostles did or did not continue in Jerusalem after their Master's death. Yet in regard to so simple a matter we have divergent accounts, and no objective certainty.

As regards the Ascension, our accounts are unsatisfactory in an even greater degree. "In some of the oldest accounts," Harnack observes,<sup>1</sup> "the resurrection and the sitting at the right hand of God are taken as parts of the same act, without mention of any ascension. In the Epistle of Barnabas both resurrection and ascension happen in one day, and only the Acts of the Apostles, in the New Testament, tells us that forty days elapsed between the two. Other ancient authorities<sup>2</sup> give us again a different story, and make the interval eighteen months." Paul, as we have seen, does not mention a physical ascension, nor does Matthew.

The fact is that some account of an ascension became a necessity as soon as the corporeal resurrection from the dead was accepted. The body of the Master had left the tomb. What further account was to be given of it? Could it merely return to the tomb? Surely not. What really became of the body of the crucified Jesus is a problem which history is utterly powerless to solve. We may have theories; but we can never have any trustworthy knowledge. And naturally faith filled the gap. When the minds of the early Christians

<sup>1</sup> *Apost. Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Swete, however, points out that this view was only taken by the Valentinians.

were dwelling on the passing of their Master into heaven, it was natural that their imaginations should be guided by the tales with which from infancy they had been familiar. They would remember how Elijah had been carried away in the sight of the sons of the prophets by a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And on that analogy a story of the ascension of the body of the Master would naturally fashion itself, and would survive because suited to its surroundings.

The great historic difficulties which hang about the Resurrection and the Ascension cannot be denied by any open-minded person. But some candid critics may be disposed to ask why, supposing objective history to be beyond recovery, ideal history should not be left in possession of the field. "If you can show what really happened at the time," they will say, "we are quite willing to accept new views. But in the absence of historic certainty, we are at liberty to accept any view which cannot be disproved, and which tallies with our Christian beliefs." This argument seems to me a sound one, up to a certain point. The continued presence of Christ with the disciples was an experience, and what one desiderates is merely the most reasonable explanation of the fact. But our candid critic has not met the real objection to the tale of the physical resurrection: namely, its radical materialism. It is not the belief of the disciples that they saw their Lord which raises any difficulty. What they felt in their inmost hearts they may well have seen with their outward eyes. It is the eating and drinking, the thrusting of Thomas's hand into his Master's side, the bodily disappearance into the clouds, which make our difficulty. Some modern Christians carry on the tale to its logical end, and think that the body of Jesus is still an object of worship to the saints in heaven. All this repels the man of science and offends the spiritual. Yet it is easy to see that at the time this particular form of the story of the Resurrection was the only one which could find credence. Even the Fourth Evangelist, most spiritual of Christian writers, accepts it. But he adds to the narrative of Thomas's conversion a phrase of deep meaning, which seems like a protest against the materialism to which he was obliged to give way: "Blessed are they that have

not seen, and yet have believed." We may judge that those who rejected the physical resurrection were in most cases those who denied that Christ survived the cross. But with us the case is different. The materialist circumstances of the tale of the Resurrection are now an impediment rather than a help to faith. And it is a question whether, in mere deference to authority, we need continue to carry round our necks this weight of dead science and unhistoric theory.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE DESCENT INTO HADES

It is a notable illustration of the great intellectual and religious gap which lies between us and the Creeds of the early Church that they dwell upon some things which have to us become indifferent or unmeaning, and say little of some things which are to us all-essential. The doctrine of the Living Christ, which is the life-breath of Evangelical Christianity, is at least very inadequately treated in the Creeds, as well as in the Articles of the Church of England. But, on the other hand, Creeds and Articles alike dwell on matters almost foreign to the modern intellect. I speak especially of the two tenets, mentioned in the Creeds, and in the third and fourth Articles, of the Descent of Christ into Hell or Hades, and of the Second Advent.

<sup>1</sup> In the shortest of all the Articles of the Church of England we read, "As Christ died for us, and was buried, so also is it to be believed that he went down into hell." This briefness and the absence alike of explanation and of emphasis are sufficiently expressive, as if the compilers of the Articles could not well leave out a thesis which finds a place in the Apostles' Creed, though not in that of Nicæa. We may in fact venture to call the doctrine of the Descent into Hades a piece of dead wood from the tree of Christian doctrine. This very want of actuality in the doctrine fits it the better for purposes of historical investigation. We can venture to handle it, not indeed without reverence, but without that ever-present fear

<sup>1</sup> I repeat here some paragraphs of a paper which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in March 1895.

of hurting the Christian conscience, which makes it so difficult to analyse many of the doctrines of Christianity in the fearless fashion in which they must be treated when approached from the purely historical point of view.

In his remarkable paper on the Apostles' Creed,<sup>1</sup> Harnack writes as follows :

"The phrase *descendit ad inferna (inferos)* first appears, so far as I know, in the baptismal confession of the Church of Aquileia ; after that, not only in Gallic confessions, but in the Irish and elsewhere. In the East it first makes its appearance in the confession of the Fourth Synod of Sirmium, A.D. 359. It is not found in the Creeds of Nicæa and Constantinople. But as early as the second century we trace in literature, alike in the writings of fathers and heretics, the notion that Christ descended into the lower world, and there preached, as before him John the Baptist, and after him the Apostles."

Harnack does not here decide whether the doctrine started with passages in our New Testament. And this caution seems justified, because the authoritative phrases in professedly Apostolic writings are by no means easy of explanation. They are, as is well known, two. First we have the Pauline saying (*Ephesians* iv. 9), "Now this, he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth." And, second, we have the phrase in 1 *Peter* iii. 18 : Christ, "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit ; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." The Pauline phrase may imply no more than death, and is so vague as scarcely to give an opening for discussion, but the Petrine is far more definite, and demands some attention. Let us for a moment consider it in the light of a historic record. I can easily imagine (analogies are plentiful enough) that some one might find in it a statement made by our Lord after his resurrection to St. Peter, and by him committed to writing. Such views there are no means, so far as I know, of directly refuting. It is only possible to point out the general historic improbabilities

<sup>1</sup> Page 28 of the 25th edition. A translation of this paper by Mrs. Humphry Ward is published in the *Nineteenth Century* (July 1893).



which they involve. This particular passage the less requires a very serious treatment, partly because it is strongly suspected of being an interpolation, partly because its meaning is very obscure. On the face of it, it refers to the antediluvians who rejected the preaching of Noah; the key of it probably rests in some theory or fancy of contemporary Judaism. Among the many interpretations given of it, several find no connection with the *infern* at all. As any discussion of them would lead us too far afield, I hope it may not be too bold to merely mask the fortress as one which cannot be stormed, and pass on, leaving it in the rear. Since the Apostolic writings and those of the Christian Fathers alike afford no secure historic basis for the *Descensus*, we cannot do better than adhere to the opinion of the late Bishop of Carlisle,<sup>1</sup> who regards it as "obvious that" (the *Descensus*) "can in no manner or degree depend upon history; it is essentially transcendental, supernatural, hyper-historical."

If, however, the tale be thus removed from the field of historic fact to that of pious construction, it at once becomes legitimate to investigate it according to the methods of anthropology and comparative religion, to search for its origin in previous beliefs, and for its relation to Jewish and Gentile mythology. In thus treating it I shall to some degree anticipate the line of thought more fully worked out when I come to deal with what are in a stricter sense the doctrines of Christianity. This may perhaps have the advantage of preparing the reader's mind for the method I shall hereafter follow.

I think it more than probable, almost demonstrable, that the notion of the Descent into Hades arose under the influence of a particular school of Pagan mythology, that of the Orphists, and was, like many another Pagan belief, admitted into Christianity after baptism into the name of Christ.<sup>2</sup> We must speak briefly as to the views of Hades held by this school.

It was the teaching of the Orphist schools as to the future world which formed the kernel of all their doctrine, and by

<sup>1</sup> Goodwin, *The Foundations of the Creed*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Dieterich, *Nekyia*, 1893; and Heussner, *Altchristl. Orpheusdarstellungen*, 1893. Cf. also Rohde, *Psyche*, 1894.

this they at once aroused the interest of philosophers and secured the adhesion of the common people. A quotation from Plato's *Republic* will set this in a clear light. "The blessings which Musæus and his son represent the gods as bestowing on the just are still more delectable than these; for they bring them to the abode of Hades and describe them as reclining on couches at a banquet of the pious, with garlands on their heads." "The ungodly, on the other hand, and the unjust, they plunge into a swamp in Hades, and condemn them to carry water in a sieve."<sup>1</sup> With these statements of the Orphic poets, Plato, in the passage from which I cite, compares the poems of Homer and Hesiod, which promise to the just reward not in the future life, but in that which is present:

As grows the fame of blameless kings, who fear the gods and reign  
In righteousness, while plenteous corn springs from the wealthy  
plain;

Their trees with fruit are laden still, their flocks with lambs abound,  
While in the sea a harvest rich by fishers' toil is found.

The contrast is very suggestive. The orthodox and typical poets of Greece dwell, just as do the poets and prophets of the Jews, on the temporal rewards of a good life; it is left to Orpheus and to Musæus to bring in a new world to redress the inequalities of the old. And the testimony of Plato is fully confirmed by all that we know of Greek religious beliefs and burial customs. The future world of ordinary belief was dull and gray, joyless and unattractive. But it was no place of rewards and punishments, of the transports of the blessed, and the tortures of the condemned. This is, so far as we can judge, a foreign element which belongs not to ordinary Greek religion, but specially to Orphism, to the religion of Dionysus and of Eleusis, to the mysteries and initiations which always remain foreign to the pure naturalism and gentle scepticism of the better educated Hellenes.

It seems altogether a mistake to insist, as does Dieterich,<sup>2</sup> on the Greek origin of the notions of places of reward and punishment which were so widely spread in the countries of

<sup>1</sup> Page 363, c. Translation of Davies and Vaughan.

<sup>2</sup> In his *Nekyia*, already mentioned.

the Levant during the five centuries which precede the Christian era. He is doubtless right in maintaining them to be altogether foreign to all the older literature of the Jews. And they come to us necessarily in a Greek dress, in words of Greek philosophers and poets. But their origin, as I conceive, is by no means Hellenic. The Greeks themselves derived Orphism from Thrace, the mysteries of Sabazius from Phrygia, and the story of Zagreus from Crete. They represent Pythagoras as journeying into Egypt and the far East, and thence bringing back his theosophic lore. The clearest sight we obtain of the mystic doctrine of Hades comes to us from Egypt and Babylon. And that doctrine found its strongest seat not among pure Greeks, but among the imperfectly Hellenised races of Asia Minor and Syria and Southern Italy.

It is clear that the details of the beliefs as to the future world filtered through from a lower to a higher civilisation. The tortures supposed to be there inflicted on the condemned could have been imagined only by peoples to whom the torture of criminals and prisoners taken in war was an ordinary and an agreeable subject of meditation. Only barbarians and those classes of civilised peoples which remained at a barbarous level could really have welcomed such notions. Thinking and cultivated men who entertained them would interpret them not literally but metaphorically, and turn the flames which savages love to apply to their captured foes into cleansing and purifying means of moral reform. In the same way the rewards of virtue, which, as Plato says, Musæus regards as consisting in perpetual feasting and drunkenness, would gradually be converted by the more cultivated into celestial repose, and the enjoyment of converse with the gods. Though in the passage above cited Plato speaks in contempt of the Orphic writings, he does not hesitate to borrow from them the materials of those myths as to the future life which form a noble part of such works as the *Phædo* and the *Republic*.

In India we find a parallel contrast between the comparatively pure theism of the pure-blooded Brahmins, and the crude beliefs of the low-caste peoples, with all their fables of heaven and hell, and their veneration for impure and hideous deities. Indeed in all countries something of the same kind may be

observed. But to the well-being of a nation cruder as well as more refined religion is necessary. From time to time the fading beliefs of the educated have to be reinforced by impulses from below. The wild tree of faith grows most freely among the unrefined, and it is by successive graftings upon that tree that the great religions of the world have arisen and flourished.

It is not, however, in Greece alone that we may trace the working of these tendencies. We may see it, though less clearly, in the literature of the Jews; not in the earlier literature, as I have already observed, but in the later. The book of Daniel, dating from the Maccabean age, is perhaps the earliest work in which any clear differentiation, as regards the unseen world, is manifest. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."<sup>1</sup> To find a more detailed account of Hades we must turn to the books of the Apocrypha, written in Greek, and pervaded by ideas, not precisely Hellenic, but Hellenistic. In particular, the Book of Enoch, which deals largely in eschatology and the secrets of the universe, speaks in some detail of the future of righteous and wicked: "All goodness and joy and glory are prepared for them, and are written down for the spirits of those who have died in righteousness, and manifold good will be given to you in recompense for your labours, and your lot is abundantly beyond the lot of the living." And in contrast: "Know ye that their souls" (the sinners) "will be made to descend into Sheol, and they will become wretched, and great will be their tribulation; and into darkness and a net and a burning fire, where there is grievous condemnation, will your spirits enter; and there will be grievous condemnation for the generations of the world."<sup>2</sup> In the fourth book of Esdras<sup>3</sup> it is said of the enemies of God, that "they shall decay in confusion and be consumed with shame, and wither in fear, when they see the glory of the Most High, in whose sight they sin while they are

<sup>1</sup> *Daniel* xii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Enoch*, edited and translated by Charles, ch. ciii.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. vii. 87.

alive." Much influence on later Jewish thought was exercised by a well-known passage of the later Isaiah: <sup>1</sup> "They shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." These words in their primary meaning refer to the material bodies of the dead, but in the Hellenistic age they were used of the future world of spirits. And the picture of which the outline was thus sketched was by degrees filled in from non-biblical sources. But this filling in went on but slowly, and was not far advanced at the beginning of the Christian era.

In regard to Hebrew utterances as to the world beyond the grave, one point is very noteworthy. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul belongs not to the Jews, but to the Greeks.<sup>2</sup> The coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and in particular of the bodies of the dead, the future glories of Israel: these are the ideas by which Hebrew writers are dominated. The notion of places of bliss and of torment, awaiting the soul at its exit from life, though it appears in later Jewish literature, appears in a subordinate place. And that this notion is exotic is indicated by the fact, that so far as it is clothed in physical imagery, the imagery can be traced, not to the earlier sacred books of the race, but to the literature of the Greeks, and in particular to that part of it which was dominated by the ideas and the doctrines of Orphism. But, generally speaking, the Jewish writers confine themselves to vague phrases, and avoid definite descriptions, as is natural to a people to whom the arts of sculpture and painting were forbidden.

In the writings of the New Testament the world of spirits and of future rewards and punishments is touched on with great sobriety and reticence. In the sayings attributed to our Lord we find such phrases as "My father's house," and "outer darkness," and the expression taken from Isaiah, as to "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched;" but detailed descriptions of the world beyond the grave are wanting.

<sup>1</sup> Ch. lxvi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Renan, *Histoire du Peuple d'Israël*, v. p. 65, etc.



The fullest description to be found in the Gospels is that contained in the story of Dives and Lazarus, which is found in the Third Gospel only, and which is, moreover, on the face of it, a parable. And the Apostles in this matter adhere closely to the custom of their Master. In their writings there is scarcely a trace of any attempt to inflame the zeal of their adherents by pictures of future bliss, or to terrify their opponents by detailed threats of torment awaiting them in a future existence.

When, however, we come to the Christian Apocalypses we find another range of phenomena. On no subject did the imagination of the early Christians dwell with more persistency than on pictures of the world beyond the grave, of the sufferings of the damned, and the bliss of the followers of Christ. Obviously for these pictures materials were needed. But they were not to be found either in the teaching of the Master or in the Jewish sacred books. Whence, then, could they be derived? The obvious source was Orphism. And Dieterich, by a careful analysis of one of the Christian Apocalypses, that passing under the name of Peter, has clearly shown that the details on which it dwells were taken from the current beliefs and the sacred books of the Orphic mysticism.

The Orphic authorities dwelt with constant emphasis on the details of the happiness awaiting their adherents beyond the grave, and particularly on the various kinds of torments reserved for the wicked and the disobedient in the world of shades. They spoke of the ever-burning fire, the rivers of mud and filth, the snakes and monsters which dwelt there, and the evil spirits who tormented the inhabitants, who were hung upon trees, roasted alive, or plunged in morasses of blood and ordure. Virgil, in an Orphic passage, speaks of these tortures (*Aen.* vi. 739):

Ergo exercentur poenis, veterumque malorum  
Supplicia expendunt; aliae panduntur inanis  
Suspensae ad ventos; aliis sub gurgite vasto  
Infectum eluitur scelus, aut exuritur igni.

It cannot be mere coincidence that in the Petrine Apocalypse the same tortures are dwelt on, with close coincidence even in expression.

This is a matter on which I cannot dwell as it deserves. To set forth the evidence in detail would occupy us too long. But I think that if the whole evidence were duly arrayed, it would leave little refuge for doubt in any mind. The heaven and the hell of early Christian writers and of the Middle Ages owe their origin neither to the teaching of Christ nor to that of his Apostles. Nor are they derived either from the established Jewish or the established Hellenic religion; but so far as they have a source in either, that source was itself derived from the underground mystic beliefs and speculations of the more primitive and probably non-Hellenic peoples of Asia Minor and Hellas, and even the races of Syria and Babylon. The Greeks, so far as influenced by those beliefs, had worked them into artistic form in the poems of Pindar and the paintings of Polygnotus. The Jews, so far as influenced by those beliefs, had formed vague conceptions of a life in the presence of God, and of a fire in which the wicked were consumed for ever. But the early Christians went much further, and imported from Orphism into Christianity notions of the future world at once of a more definite and a less refined character.

There are two motives readily discernible which would induce the early Christians to give form to their doctrine of the descent of their Founder into the world of shades. In the first place, since Jesus was supposed to have been buried on the Friday and to have risen on the Sunday, the question would naturally be asked where his spirit remained in the intermediate period; and the answer which would naturally be given was that it was in the world of shades, in Hades. We have already seen that some of the fathers did not seek to attach to the doctrine a fuller meaning than this. And, in the second place, speculation would naturally arise in the Church as to the state of departed worthies of the Old Testament. Would they, merely because born too early, be deprived of the benefits of the death of Christ? This could scarcely be supposed; and thus it was natural that it should be maintained that as Jesus had preached to men on earth, so on the day succeeding the crucifixion he preached to those who had left the world before his birth.

As disembodied spirits might wait for a body wherein they could come to life on the earth, so these desires and tendencies would await a mythical and doctrinal body wherein they could find expression in the nascent Church. Whence should such a body come? It could not come from a use of Old Testament narrative and theology, since none of the Jewish worthies had been to the land of shades and returned. Enoch had been taken by God; Elijah had been carried up alive to heaven, but neither had passed through Sheol on the way. But, though the idea of a visit to Hades, and a return thence, was foreign to the classical literature of the Jews, it had a place in the religious writings and speculations of many other peoples. In Babylonian legend, the goddess Ishtar went down into the world of spirits, there for a while to abide and thence with difficulty to return. Buddha went, to complete his mission, to Hell, to save by preaching those who had died in sin; and not dissimilar tales are told in the primitive lore of more barbarous peoples. On these, however, we need not dwell, since there seems no reason to believe that such tales would be known by or influence the members of the early Christian Churches of Greater Greece and Italy. But there were current in those regions stories of heroes, well known wherever Greek was spoken, who had made the voyage to Hades. And these stories belong to the mystic mythology of the Orphists in a peculiar manner, whencesoever they may originally have come. It was told how Hercules descended into the abode of Hades, and dragged away the watch-dog Cerberus. Odysseus, by the advice of Circe, had voyaged to the mouth of the world of the dead, and consulted the seer Teiresias as to future things. But the passage of the *Odyssey* which describes this visit is supposed to have been largely adulterated by Orphic influence; Onomacritus, the Orphic sage, having had a share in the collection and editing of the Homeric poems at the Court of Pisistratus. We hear of a journey to Hades by Pythagoras, in which he saw the soul of Hesiod bound to a pillar, and that of Homer hung in a tree, as a punishment for speaking unworthily of the gods. And Persephone, the august goddess of Eleusis, had herself been carried by violence to the world of shades, and thence been restored for a time to her mother on earth. Dionysus

also went to Hades to bring back thence his mother Semele.<sup>1</sup>

But of all the visits to Hades recorded in Orphic mythology by far the most important was that of Orpheus himself. The lovely and pathetic story told by the poets on the subject is familiar to all; how he could not live without his lost Eurydice, and so, with a love stronger than death, followed her to the realm of Hades; how his lyre won a way for him, and so softened the heart of the stern rulers of the dead that Eurydice was allowed to follow her husband on the road to the world above on condition that he did not look at her; and how at last he violated in his longing the stern condition, and Eurydice was reft from him once more and for ever. Such was the tale of the poets; but it would seem that the tales told of the *descensus* of Orpheus in the Orphic books and in the mysteries were different and more serious by far.

The same ideas found expression in Christian doctrine in the quasi-historical doctrine of the Descent of our Lord into Hades. The language in which the idea clothed itself was borrowed from Orphism. Christ succeeded and superseded the great prophet of Hellenistic mysticism. In this case also Pagan beliefs were ennobled and glorified by being baptized into the name of Christ. And with the main doctrine came a train of consequences. As the Christian *descensus ad inferos* took the place of the Orphic *κατάβασις εἰς ᾍδου*, so the Apocalyptic pictures of heaven and hell, of the triumph of Christ, and the liberation of imprisoned souls, were merely enlarged and glorified copies of the supernatural landscape of the Orphic eschatology. In the Gospel of Nicodemus, which contains a long description of the Descent of Christ and his victory over death and hell, we find a long colloquy between Hades and Satan. The Greek lord of the world of shades and the arch-enemy of Jewish theology are alike introduced as persons in the drama of the triumph of Christianity. The power to be broken was the power of Satan, but the scene of the conflict was that which had been developed by Hellenistic speculation.

Unfortunately the adoption into Christianity was in this

<sup>1</sup> Diodorus, iv. 25.

case late, and the transformation incomplete. Greek good taste had rejected centuries before the baser descriptions of bliss and torment which Orphism owed to its lowly birth and obscure course. Neo-Platonism and Eleusis had allegorised them into spirituality. The Jews had refused them as unworthy. There is no taint of them in the writings of the New Testament. But into the subterranean Christianity of the Roman Empire they made way but too readily. Every one knows how deeply they stained the thought as well as the art of the Middle Ages. Modern religion rejects the materialist distortions, while preserving the spiritual substance. And in doing so it loses nothing. To any thinking man the simple phrases of the Gospels as to the fire which cannot be quenched, and the worm which dies not, are far more terrible in their intensity of meaning than the barbarous imagery raised to sublimity in Dante, which was a frequent subject of ridicule even in the ages of faith, and is now set aside by the common feeling of Christians.

Our investigation of the *descensus ad inferos* has thus led us into a study of a particular religious development during a few centuries. The result has been the discovery of a great probability that the Christian doctrine of the Descent into Hades, together with the imagery in which the future world was presented to the early Christian imagination, was derived neither from a Christian nor from a Jewish, nor even a Hellenic source, but from the mystic lore of Dionysus and Orpheus. And however much the doctrine was Christianised, it never wholly shook off, especially among the unlearned, a certain barbarism which belongs to its origin.

We shall see later that direct borrowing from Greek mystic lore by Christian belief was very rare; in fact the *descensus* stands almost alone as an example in early times: of influence and parallelism extending from the Greek Mysteries to Christianity we can find abundant traces.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SECOND ADVENT

NEXT to the embodiment of the ideas of early Christianity in ideal histories of the Founder, we have to speak of their incorporation in prophecy: prophecy as to the end of the world, the second coming of the Messiah, and the last great judgment.

Of all the phenomena of the early Church, none was more intensely Jewish than were these prophecies. Prophecy belonged especially to the Jews. They alone among ancient peoples succeeded often in merging the present in the future. Among the Greeks the prophet was despised and looked upon as a charlatan. Among the Jews he frequently stood at the head of the whole religious life of the nation. The Greeks lived for the ideal. But among the more materialistic Hebrews the ideal naturally developed itself as that which should hereafter take place in the world, under conditions of space and time.

It was because the Jews felt with greater intensity than any other race that the course of events in this world of ours is under the direct and undeviating direction of God, that they passed thus naturally from that which ought to be to that which shall be. According to some of their prophets, such as Ezekiel, the righteous man must be rewarded, and the wicked man punished during the present life. Thus the throne of a king who served God must necessarily be abiding and prosperous because it was established in righteousness. So it was but a step to pass from a conviction of the wickedness of Babylon to

a prophecy of the fall of Babylon. And so, however Israel was persecuted and oppressed, yet if he remained in the ways of the Lord, his restoration to prosperity and honour was certain.

But when in the course of time the bitter experience of life gradually wore down the naïve belief that the good are always prosperous, two new elements became prominent in the popular Jewish belief as to the future: first, that a purposeful intervention from above, the appearance of a Messiah, was necessary to restore the perverted ways of the world; and, second, that justice could not be preserved unless the virtuous Israelites who had been laid in the grave in sadder ages rose again in the days of the Messiah to share his kingdom, and to receive the reward of the good deeds done in the flesh.

The strong reaction of the national conscience in the days of the Maccabees against Greek ways of thought and Greek dominion had indelibly stamped upon the Jewish heart the idea of a great coming deliverer who should not merely save Israel from his enemies but exalt him above all the peoples of the earth. The expectations formed of the Messiah varied from time to time and from writer to writer. Some of the Jews thought only of a selfish triumph for their race, but the nobler minds hoped that by their victory all the nations of the world would be benefited, and brought near to the God of Israel; that salvation should spread outwards from the renovated Jerusalem, until all peoples had a share in its blessedness.

When the followers of Jesus had entirely accepted their Master as the promised Messiah, it might seem that they would be driven to substitute the idea of the suffering and redeeming servant of God for that of the triumphant ruler in their conception of the promised Messiah. But cherished national ideals do not easily die. And even after the death upon the cross had painted in indelible colours the outlines of the Christian Messiah, the early disciples could not entirely give up aspirations which had been woven into the fabric of the national character, but still went back to the conviction that at some time, sooner or later, the suffering Christ would lay aside his meekness and gentleness and appear as a mighty ruler and a stern judge, trampling upon Gentile and

hostile Jew and placing his followers upon the throne of power.

And this is exactly the conviction mirrored in the eschatological discourses of the Synoptists. In them there is a sentiment almost entirely Jewish, the Gentile being regarded as a natural foe. And the drama culminates in the appearance of the Lord in the clouds of heaven and the gathering together of the elect. Of a moral judgment, the separation of the evil and the good, there is no mention in these eschatological speeches.

We have abundant indications in the Gospel narratives that the death of Jesus came upon the disciples as a profound surprise, and an utter disappointment. In time the Church was to learn that that death was the source of her own life; that Christ in heaven was nearer and dearer than Christ on earth. But before this great truth had been realised, there was an intermediate time of transition, when the disciples regarded their Master's absence from them as brief, and his death as a mere episode in the history of his work upon earth. At the beginning of the *Acts* the disciples are represented as asking eagerly of their risen Lord, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Though we cannot regard the incident as historical, yet doubtless this was the mental attitude of the early disciples, and we catch the note of hope deferred in the reply chronicled, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

Certainly no belief of Christianity filled so large a share in the horizon of the early Christians as that in the Second Advent. One may fairly say that without it Christianity would have taken quite another character, if, indeed, it had persisted at all. We must think of many early disciples as living in constant expectation of the trumpet-call which should proclaim the final resurrection, as looking upon all the arrangements of civil life as of so temporary a character as to be scarcely worth a thought. It is obvious how such a belief would act in making Christians steadfast under persecution, contemptuous of civil government, and regardless of worldly wealth and all considerations of prudence.

They did not at first even care to commit to writing the teaching of their Founder, fully expecting that the Second Advent would take place before the generation of eye-witnesses died out. And few of them would dream of consciously making arrangements for the continuation of the organisation and discipline of the Church in future generations.

It was only after the terrible series of events which ended in the total destruction of Jerusalem that the second coming of the Messiah was gradually detached from the Jewish expectation of a visible reign of the saints on the earth, and more and more closely connected with a looking for a great judgment of souls and a realm where the blessed dwelt in heaven. This hope was not, however, of Jewish origin, but came from elsewhere. We have sufficiently spoken of it in the last chapter. It preceded the triumph of the great Christian idea of an exalted Saviour, which is indeed embodied in the writings of St. Paul, but did not filter down to the level of ordinary Christians until a much later period.

It is a very difficult, probably an insoluble problem, to determine what ground a belief in a Second Advent had in the sayings of the Founder. If we turn to the Synoptic Gospels we shall find that a considerable part of them is devoted to prophecies by Jesus of his second coming. Other doctrines are based on detached texts, this on whole chapters, and on great sections of that Common Tradition which is perhaps the most primitive part of the Gospels. If beliefs were true and important in proportion to the amount of authority to be found for them in the Gospel narratives, no part of the creed of Christendom would stand more firmly than this. But Apocalypses never bear the name of their real authors; they are always put in the mouth of some prophet or authority. And the representatives of ordinary orthodoxy who usually uphold the perfect trustworthiness of our Evangelists are almost obliged in this case to suppose considerable mixture in their traditions or confusion in their minds. The Evangelists, it is said, confused the Second Advent with the fall of Jerusalem and other coming calamities. And I imagine that no candid critic can examine the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, with the

parallel passages in the other Gospels, without seeing strong evidence that they are not altogether trustworthy. We find in them references to the preaching of the Gospel among the Gentiles; to persecutions of the Christians; to Jerusalem being compassed with armies: all of which phrases point to a time considerably after the Crucifixion. We cannot say whether these discourses may have had some basis in the words of the Master. But in any case those words must be distorted and interpolated.

Harnack well observes,<sup>1</sup> "In the matter of eschatology no one can say what sayings come from Christ, and what from the disciples." That the tradition here was very uncertain, because influenced by the Jewish Apocalyptic, is shown by the one fact that Papias (in *Iren.* v. 33) quotes as words of the Lord, which had been handed down by the disciples, a group of sayings which we find in the Apocalypse of Baruch, about the amazing fruitfulness of the earth during the time of the Messianic kingdom. So M. Réville observes with justice that the prophecies of the last things are not in the manner of Jesus. "N'est-il pas surprenant que les enseignements de Jésus, même quand il énonce des idées qui ne sont pas précisément nouvelles, ont toujours un cachet original, individuel, frappé nettement à sa marque personnelle, et qu'ici, au contraire, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus banal dans les apocalypses qui nous est présenté comme sa révélation suprême?"<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that at the time of the siege of Jerusalem the Christians fled from the city, and it is generally supposed that their flight, the motive for which was a command of their Master, was made in consequence of the existence among them of prophecies, such as that of *Luke* xxi. 20, "When ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." It appears, however, more probable that Eusebius is right in his statement that the flight was in consequence of a direct revelation to the Christians at the time;<sup>3</sup> and, if so, that the words of the Evangelist were written after, and took their colour from, the event.

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd edition, i. 65, 97; Trans. i. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Jésus de Nazareth*, ii. 321.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius writes (*H. E.* iii. 5), κατὰ τινα χρησµὸν τοῖς αὐτοῖσι δοκίμοις δι' ἀποκαλύψεως ἐκδοθέντα. Cf. Renan, *L'Antéchrist*, p. 296.



Passing from the eschatological discourses, let us turn to other parts of the Synoptic Gospels, which have a stronger imprint of authenticity.

There are certain passages in the Common Tradition in which Jesus is described as speaking of a coming of the Son of Man, in the glory of his Father, and surrounded by the holy angels, that he may judge the world in righteousness.<sup>1</sup> And in a magnificent discourse peculiar to Matthew (xxv. 31-46) the details of this judgment are dwelt on in words of wonderful power and solemnity. These passages are intertwined with much that is most characteristic of the teaching of Jesus. In particular in the discourse in *Matthew* one may fairly say that alike the Jewish doctrine of a supernatural revelation of the Messiah as judge and deliverer, and the Greek Hellenistic doctrine of an inevitable moral judgment of souls, receive baptism into Christ, and are raised to a higher level for ever. The sublime verdict, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," is of the very essence of the Christian religion, and full of the spirit of the Founder of it.

At the same time, if we regard these passages, in the form in which they have reached us, as belonging wholly to Jesus, we fall into difficulties various and serious. A close examination of the context of the parable of the sheep and the goats is instructive. The vision of the judgment and the separation as of sheep and goats comes in a group with other sublime parables of kindred type, such as that of the wise and foolish virgins and that of the talents. It has been already suggested<sup>2</sup> that it is a materialist view of these parables to suppose them to refer to a catastrophic coming of the Messiah; and that it is far more suitable to regard them as having reference to the quiet spread of the Christian Society, or even to the coming of the Son of Man in the lives and experiences of individuals. It is by no means improbable that in its original form the parable of the Great Judgment also may be quite detached from the promise of a visible judgment of mankind. In the text, it is true, the moral is brought in, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man

<sup>1</sup> *Matt.* xvi. 27; *Mark* viii. 38; *Luke* ix. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ch.* XVII.

cometh." Yet the coming of the Son of Man thus spoken of might not mean a future advent, but the dawning of the kingdom of God on the hearers whether socially or individually. This is most clearly indicated by that remarkable passage in *Luke* (xvii. 20), where Jesus sets himself to correct the fancy of the Pharisees that the kingdom of God would immediately appear, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you."<sup>1</sup> That is a most luminous saying, and one which could not have been invented by any disciple; and it throws a strong light on many other passages. It suggests that the discourse in Matthew above cited is really of the nature of a parable, which changed its character in passing through the minds of Jewish auditors. Many other passages in the Gospels which bear reference to a future judgment may thus have been drawn out of their proper orbit by the force of the prevailing beliefs as to a great day of judgment.

We have already, in speaking of the parables of the kingdom, found similar phenomena. And if now we turn back to the long eschatological discourses we shall see indications in them also of a confusion between the Second Advent and the coming of the kingdom of God in the heart. The phrase, "The one shall be taken and the other left," admirably applies to the seemingly capricious action of the divine influence on individuals, but it is singularly inappropriate in speaking of an outward manifestation, which must equally affect all. A still clearer proof of misunderstanding is found in a comparison of *Matt.* xvi. 28 with *Mark* ix. 1 and *Luke* ix. 27.<sup>2</sup> Mark represents Jesus as saying that some of those who stand by "shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power." Luke omits the words "with power." But Matthew alters the phrase into "shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Evidently Matthew or his source, at the moment of writing, thought of the kingdom of God and the

<sup>1</sup> The revisers of the English Bible adhere to this translation, though in the margin they give the alternative rendering "in the midst of you."

<sup>2</sup> This comparison is due to M. Réville, *Jésus de Nazareth*, ii. 323.

Second Advent as synonyms. But, as we know, this was far from being the attitude of mind of the Master. The version of Luke seems to be clearly the most trustworthy; and the saying of the Master may only mean that he anticipated a wide spread of the Christian society even in the lifetime of the Apostles.

In this matter, as in many others, the Fourth Gospel, in spite of its later date and its strong personal tinge, seems to bring us nearer to the higher Christian teaching than do the Synoptists. In this Gospel the Second Advent is not dwelt on, and is indeed scarcely mentioned.<sup>1</sup> But there are passages in it which seem expressly designed to counteract the more material and thaumaturgic view of that advent and the final judgment, which was no doubt fast spreading, and to develop the higher meaning which should be attached to it.

In the farewell discourse of *John* xiv., Jesus speaks with great impressiveness of his future reunion with his disciples. The separation is not to be long, and to end in a more perfect union than before. That union seems in some places to be spoken of as taking place in the future life. "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." But in other places it seems to be spoken of as taking place on earth. "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." The second coming here spoken of is no such visible appearance in the clouds as the Synoptists, and even St. Paul, confidently expected, but a spiritual presence in the hearts of the disciples. It is marvellous how this Evangelist rises by a wonderful inspiration above the level of his contemporaries; how almost everything that he touches loses its material qualities, and becomes purely spiritual. He, like St. Paul, lived in Christ, but unlike St. Paul he had no illusions as to an approaching catastrophe, which was to overwhelm the heathen world and usher in the reign of the saints. He sounds even in regard to the last judgment a similar note:<sup>2</sup> "I came

<sup>1</sup> Cf. xxi. 22, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" This phrase belongs to an appendix, not to the body of the Gospel, which ends with ch. xx.

<sup>2</sup> xii. 47.

not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." The meaning of this passage, clear enough at first sight, becomes still clearer if we compare another passage in the Gospel,<sup>1</sup> "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me."

How much of this teaching is from Jesus himself, and how much was imparted from above to the writer of the Gospel, we know not, and we never shall know. But its meaning is clear. It is the teaching of Jesus which judges *ipso facto* those who hear and reject it or fail to appreciate it. It is the life of Jesus and of his successors in the Church which condemns those who having seen the better follow the worse. A judgment more terrible than that of any personal judge, since it is, humanly speaking, not to be escaped, falls upon every conscious sin and every avoidable declension from the highest path. Christ will judge the Christian, as Moses will judge the Jew, and we may add, as Buddha will judge the Buddhist, by the mere power of the idea working through law, and crushing that which opposes itself to the higher life. So "that servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes."

Thus there appears to me to be grave doubt whether we are justified in saying that Jesus foretold his own second coming for judgment. But it must be confessed that the majority of recent critics regard it as almost indisputable that he did give utterance to such predictions. Hausrath observes that in accepting the claim to Messiahship, Jesus must have accepted the claim to appear in judgment. M. Jean Réville asks whence, if not from their Master, the disciples could have gained their belief in a near second coming. I cannot regard these views as established. If established, they would prove in the mind of Jesus such a confusion of thought as we find

<sup>1</sup> v. 45.

in the disciples ; but the blame would rest in the imperfect foreknowledge, not in the character or will of the Founder of Christianity.

If we pass from the prophecies of the Synoptic Gospels, the only detailed New Testament prophecy is that contained in the Book of Revelation. We have there what professes to be a detailed account of the events which shall come to pass in the world before the Second Advent. These events must be supposed limited to a brief period, since it was the universal opinion of the early Church that the Second Advent was nigh at hand ; and the words with which the seer concludes, " Behold I come quickly," show that he shared the general opinion. There is perhaps no book of the Bible which has been more successfully dealt with by criticism than the Revelation. The author of it was certainly a Jew. Certain parts of it appear to have been written by a Jew who was not a convert to Christianity, especially the passage (ch. xii.) which seems to speak of the birth of the Messiah as future. Other passages, however, are Judæo-Christian, and the whole has been redacted by a Christian writer. The date and purpose of the book has been clearly made out. It was written after the death of Nero, when a belief had risen and spread far and wide that that death had not really taken place, and when the return of the monster, " the beast," was expected by both Jews and Christians. Nero was to revive as Antichrist, and for a time to be successful, until his triumph led to the return of the Messiah and the gathering together of the elect of God.

Nero never reappeared, and if the world were governed by logic, the Apocalypse would soon have been set aside as discredited by the progress of events. But besides the mere unveiling of the future which it was the purpose of the author to accomplish, he had in him something of the true seer, the man who sees through the outward and temporary into the inward and eternal. And this element has saved his work from perishing.

It was because he was a true seer that the description of heaven which lay to him in the future bore translation from the future tense into the tense of the ideal : so that the city of gold and the tree of life have become ever since part of the regular



imagery of the Christian imagination, and a vision of the multitude that no man can number has comforted and sustained thousands both in life and death. The vision also of a great white throne and of a final judgment of the good and the evil, which is in the Apocalypse itself only a brief episode, has become detached from its fanciful surroundings and remains a lamp of conduct and a beacon of hope.

We have seen how, in many cases, the writer of the Fourth Gospel rebukes the materialism of the early Christians. He rebukes also the attempts made by writers like the author of the Apocalypse, to map out the future. "Even now have arisen many antichrists." "This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son"<sup>1</sup> Here, as always, it is to experience that the Fourth Evangelist turns, to the higher experience of the inner life, away from things of sense. He transfers, as did his Master, the great battles between good and evil from the field of history to that of psychology. No two points of view, no two habits of thought, could be more utterly opposed than that of the Fourth Evangelist and that of the writer of the Apocalypse.

We must briefly sum up what we have said in regard to New Testament prophecy. At the time when it was written there were two realms of the ideal. The Greeks, under the influence of the Platonic philosophy, had discovered a higher and spiritual world where dwelt the forms or ideas after which the present world was created. And under the influence of the nations of the East, as concentrated in the mysteries, they had brought in a new world beyond the grave to right the wrongs and the iniquities of that which lies about us. The Jews expected a great national deliverer and the setting right of all wrongs as an event of the future to take place on the visible earth.<sup>2</sup> In early Christianity we see the Jewish point of view gradually give way to the Hellenic. According to the Synoptic Gospels the Founder of Christianity spoke of a near judgment and reign of the saints. That he really held that belief cannot

<sup>1</sup> 1 *Ep. John* ii. 22. The First Epistle of John, if not by the writer of the Fourth Gospel, is by a close imitator of his.

<sup>2</sup> In the book of *Enoch* the visible world is spoken of as not worthy to be the scene of the new realm, of the heavenly Jerusalem: but here we may probably see Greek influence.

be proved ; but it is quite clear that it was held by the early Christians. In the writings of St. Paul and in the Fourth Gospel we see this view in course of transformation. Paul looks for the coming of his Master ; but he is to come, not to reign on the earth, but to take his saints to dwell with him in glory. The Fourth Evangelist reports Jesus as saying that he goes to prepare for his followers a place, and will come again to take them to dwell with him. Both of these great thinkers, while unable entirely to abandon the Jewish point of view, merge it in the belief of a transcendent spiritual existence. To this matter we return in Chapter XXXIV.

There have been periods in the history of Christianity which have witnessed a recrudescence of the expectation of the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. About the year A.D. 1000 for example the belief was almost universal that the end of the world was at hand. Yet, speaking generally, we may fairly say that the history of the doctrine has been the story of a gradual decay, until in our days belief in a literal Second Advent has passed into the background. Ordinary good Christians do not openly reject the doctrine, but it has no great influence on their conduct, nor do they feel much interest in it. It is in the condition of a mere survival, which performs no function, and which would scarcely be missed if it were removed from the scheme of Christian belief. It is most powerful among obscure sects and eccentric individuals.

Thus it has happened in this case, as in many others, that while certain of the doctrines of the early Church have become atrophied, and survive only in creeds and confessions, not in life and thought, yet they have been closely connected with beliefs of far greater vitality than their own. The bodily coming of Christ in the clouds has become to us a fanciful notion. And the vision of a great final judgment, which the sublime language of some of the parables of Jesus has made familiar to our minds, and the genius of Christian art has made luminous to our imaginations, now seems to us to be an image only. Torn out of the context of the Second Advent it can be but an image, since a formal scene of judgment demands a place and a time, which only the occasion of the Second Advent could furnish. But although the great white throne, and the

division as of the sheep from the goats, seem now but the elements of a stately vision, yet the doctrine of a final retribution has not passed, and cannot pass, from the hearts of men. Christian prophecy has been merged in the doctrine of the future life.

Of the future life I shall treat in a future chapter. Before, however, leaving this subject I must point out that there was in the Jewish Messianic belief an element which Christianity has not fully absorbed, but which the present age appreciates very highly. The persistent belief of the Jews in a coming reign of righteousness on earth, though it had in it much of materialism, also contained the germs of progress. The Jews were almost the only ancient nation which thus believed in the future of the world. Educated Greeks and Romans placed the great time of their nations in the past, and saw in the present little but degeneracy, and in the future not much of hope. But the stubborn healthiness of the Jews demanded a retribution and a reign of saints on this visible earth. As the hope of a near Second Advent failed in the Christian Church, the hope of a temporal restoration of things failed also; and Christians felt more and more that their kingdom was not of this world.

The impress thus stamped on Christianity has marked it throughout, with occasional noteworthy exceptions. But in comparatively recent times there has been a reaction against this excess. The other-worldliness of Christianity has been seen to lead to abuses. The French Revolution, and the aspirations and tendencies which have arisen out of it, have reverted to the idea of an ideal commonwealth on earth, a reign of justice and of happiness, in which the inequalities of the world shall be abolished or reduced, and peace, justice, and goodwill reign supreme. And now Christianity, which has seldom failed to absorb, and to baptize into Christ, every rising enthusiasm, has seized upon this also. We find on all sides, at least in Protestant countries, churches and societies by no means dominated by the spirit of other-worldliness; but most anxious to bring the spirit of the Master to bear on the existing fabric of society. They do not expect a Messiah to appear in the clouds; but they do hope and believe that the teaching

of Jesus which appears in the Synoptic Gospels contains remedies for all the diseases of our hectic civilisation, and the promise of a world full of brotherly love and social justice.

No one can wish anything but success to so noble an enthusiasm, and hopes so worthy. No doubt these societies will not attain all that they hope, but they may attain much. Certainly they have already done much to prevent the gap which on the Continent exists between Christianity and progress from growing wider in this country. But they may fail if they overvalue that which is without compared with that which is within, or if they assume that all evolution is progress. It is to be hoped that it may be possible, as in the early Church, to adopt the ideas of extra-Christian enthusiasm without accepting the materialism and immorality which often go with them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE CRISIS OF CHRISTIANITY

PERHAPS no period in the history of the world offers such difficulties to sober and methodic history as the first century of our era. Not to speak of Jesus himself, his early followers exhibit phenomena of the most surprising and unprecedented character. An unknown Jew endowed with little literary skill produces the Gospel of Matthew, another writer whose identity is uncertain the Gospel of Luke, which the fine taste of Renan declares to be the most beautiful book in the world. Another unknown writer produces the Fourth Gospel, one of the most marvellous religious and spiritual compositions imaginable. The disciples who at the time of the Crucifixion were dispersed, hiding, utterly discomfited, are found within a very brief space of time bold, confident, ready and determined to conquer Judæa and to carry out their Master's work. All this requires the operation of forces about which history knows very little. Where history looks for evolution, it finds a new and astounding departure. If it is determined to set aside the hypothesis of divine inspiration, it is altogether overmatched by the facts. In past chapters I have tried at least to indicate the view which colourless history would take of the life and the teachings of Jesus. Such, we think, would have been the account given of him by some interested Pagan historian, writing at the time. He would have appeared in history as Jesus of Nazareth, a reformer mighty in word, with an unrivalled genius for religion, and mighty in deed by a personal fascination which healed disease and gave mental and moral tone to the



insane, a martyr slain by Jewish fanaticism, and bitterly bewailed by many devoted followers, who had learned to recognise in him the promised Jewish Messiah.

Yet there are very few professed Christians who can now, after nineteen centuries, be content thus to describe the Founder of Christianity. The reason is that by far the greater part of the life of Jesus Christ on earth began with his death. The history of the exalted Christ is separated only by a few days from the life of the earthly Jesus. What would, according to the analogies of history, be the result of the Crucifixion? The answer is easy. The small band of the Apostles and their adherents would have fled away to Galilee. There, in the light of memory, they might have lived on for a while as a sect or a society. For a time they would have raised the tone of the country round; in the end they would probably have become an obscure sect of Judaism, or been merged in the community of the Essenes.

But what really did take place? This is a question which we cannot answer with confidence or in detail. The statements of the Pauline Epistles we can accept with confidence, though of course they are not free from personal bias. But the last chapters of the Gospels and the earlier chapters of the *Acts* are very unsatisfactory as historical records, as has been proved again and again by criticism. But however defective our evidence as to the history of the few years which followed the Crucifixion, some facts are clear. If the disciples for a brief period fled to Galilee, they soon returned to Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> the very place where their Master had been slain, and where they had daily to meet his murderers. And instead of dwelling timorously in the shade, they were soon found openly proclaiming that their Master was still with them in the spirit, and that only by union with his spirit could the world be saved. In his name they healed diseases and cast out demons; in his name they offered forgiveness of sins and the favour of God to all who would join them. And in his name they cheerfully braved persecution and even martyrdom.

And even this is not the most surprising of the phenomena.

<sup>1</sup> On this point there is a curious conflict of testimony in the Evangelists: Matthew takes the Apostles to Galilee, Luke retains them in Jerusalem.

The most wonderful fact is that for some time after the death of Jesus the teaching in the society which he founded went on developing, becoming more universal and better adapted for general acceptance. Of course, in a sense, no teaching could be more sublime or more profound than the paradoxes of the Sermon on the Mount, or the Parables of the Kingdom. And yet it does not appear that these would by themselves have conquered and renovated the world. The doctrines which conquered the world were those set forth by the authors of the Fourth Gospel and the Pauline Epistles. We can clearly see that these great theologians of the nascent Church did a vast deal to develop the teaching current in the society, as well as to put it in a new form. It was theirs to adapt to the Hellenistic world the pure spiritual teaching of Jesus. And they accomplished their task by taking up into Christianity the main religious ideas of the Hellenistic world; baptizing them, so to speak, in the name of the Master, and sending them forth on a fresh plane of influence among men.

What was the source of the force which enabled them to accomplish this mighty achievement? In part, no doubt, it was the personal fascination of Jesus himself: a power which had dwelt in him, and which mastered the hearts and the brains of those who had contact with him. Yet, however great the personal fascination of the Founder may have been, that will not in itself account for the facts of the rise of Christianity. There have been many leaders in the history of the world for whom their disciples were ready to face a thousand deaths. But the followers of Jesus forsook him and fled at the first touch of serious persecution. The spell which bound them to their Master was not of a kind to resist a severe strain. Unless our Gospels are quite worthless as historic documents, they must be taken to prove that the personality of Jesus did not, while he was alive, overpower his friends and disarm his enemies. It is astonishing how persistent was the hatred of the Pharisees, how lukewarm the support of the disciples, how all the Apostles misunderstood and undervalued their Master, and how one of them sold him to death. Then again the most effective of the early preachers of Christianity had probably never seen Jesus. It is clear that there were

other forces at work in the rapid spread of the Christian faith, besides the remembered words and deeds and personal charm of Jesus.

It was immediately after the Crucifixion that the crisis took place; that the history of Christianity took a sharp turn and moved in a new direction. Even the prominent actors of the scene are, with the one exception of Peter, changed. A very important personage in the Church at Jerusalem is James, the brother of Jesus. According to the Gospels the brothers of Jesus were, down to the Crucifixion, bitterly opposed to him, incredulous as to his mission, disposed even to doubt his sanity. But soon afterwards they are the most prominent among the Christians. Dr. Lightfoot<sup>1</sup> recalls Paul's statement that James was among the first witnesses of the Resurrection, and thinks it likely that the appearance of the crucified one to James was the cause or occasion of a complete change in his heart and life.

The Church at Jerusalem, under the leadership of the brothers of Jesus and of the Apostles, soon began to increase rapidly in numbers. But its fitting for a great career in the world came not from any mere growth in numbers, but from a radical change of character. At first purely Jewish, it soon began to develop closer and closer relations first with the Hellenistic Jews scattered through the cities of the Levant, and then with the Gentiles.

The process by which this took place can be very imperfectly discerned. Our histories of the change are confused and full of inconsistencies. The growth of the Hellenistic element in the society is most clearly shown in the circumstances of the appointment of the first deacons. A complaint had arisen, we are told, that the widows of the Hellenistic Jews were neglected in the distribution of alms. This complaint can only have arisen at a time when the organisation of the community had become definite, and the distribution of alms regular. To remedy the evil, seven deacons were appointed, and it is notable that the names of all seven are in form Greek, suggesting that all of them belonged to the class of Jews of the Diaspora. Two of the men thus ordained, Stephen

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 17.

and Philip, ran a brilliant career in the Church, and Dr. Lightfoot can hardly be wrong in maintaining that they did much to widen and make liberal the views of the leading Christians, and to prepare a way for the Pauline expansion of the Church.

Of the first admission of Gentiles who did not conform to the law of Moses, we have various discrepant accounts. According to the existing text of Matthew, Jesus before his Ascension bade the disciples teach and baptize all nations; but the attitude taken by the Church at Jerusalem towards Gentiles shows that this command is not historic. The author of *Acts* makes Peter the author of the admission of the Gentiles to baptism, after his scruples had been removed partly by a vision at Joppa, and partly by the imparting to the household of Cornelius before they were baptized of the gift of speaking with tongues. But Paul, in the *Epistle to the Galatians*, claims that the ministry to the Gentiles was his original and special function, as that to the Jews was the function of James and Peter and John. It seems to me impossible to resist the arguments by which Dr. Weizsäcker<sup>1</sup> shows that the account in *Galatians* is to be trusted and that in *Acts* rejected.

Whatever may have been the precise history of the extension of the Christian fold, there can be no question that it did extend rapidly and continuously. The section of the Church which adhered to the ideas which had been dominant just after the Crucifixion became by degrees a minority, a clique which could be disregarded. This was mainly the doing of two or three great teachers who arose in the first century. But those teachers make it perfectly clear to us in their writings that it was not their own power or wisdom which wrought in the Church, but that they were the instruments of a powerful inspiration, a spiritual force which swayed them utterly, and to which they owed everything. This force was revealed frequently in visions and direct revelations of the Lord, such as Paul speaks of, and such as are in our documents recorded as having appeared to Peter, Stephen, Philip, and all the prominent leaders of the Church. And it was also revealed in a more continuous and inner fashion in the consciousness of the Apostles. For a time the divine ideas, which underlie

<sup>1</sup> *Apostolic Age*, i. pp. 198-204.

thought and action in the world, could be more clearly observed in energising power.

St. Paul is better known to us than any character of his age. In his letters we can trace his weakness and his strength, his burning charity and profound insight on the one hand, and his Rabbinical logic on the other. Some modern writers have been so strongly impressed by the spirituality of the Pauline teaching that they have placed Paul above his Master. One can imagine with what a passionate outburst Paul would have flung aside this view. He is never tired of declaring that he owes all that he is, moral qualities and doctrines alike, to that Master. Himself the least of the Apostles, he is able in the strength of Christ to do more than they all. But when Paul thus expresses his utter dependence on his Master, he does not mean that his inspiration comes down to him from the tradition of the earthly life of Jesus. Again and again, with passionate vehemence, he claims not tradition but personal inspiration as the source of his life and his teaching. Christ, he claimed, dwelt in him, and worked through him in the Church, so that he could scarcely be said any longer to live, except in the heavenly inspirer of his life.

The author of the Fourth Gospel is entirely unknown to us. The only fixed points in regard to him are that he must have been educated in the higher Jewish teaching which rose in Alexandria, and that he must have written later than the Synoptists. He, like Paul, has his own view as to the origin of his doctrine. He also does not trust to the mere tradition of the companions of Jesus for the teaching of his Master. As regards the events of his Master's life he does use a valuable tradition, which appears from several passages to have come through the Apostle John, whose connection with Ephesus seems to be historic. But the discourses have another origin. This cannot be doubted by any one who carefully considers the discourse in *John* xiv.-xvi. The Master is there represented as saying (xvi. 12), "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he



“speak.” Now, according to the context, this was the last earthly discourse of Jesus. It seems then that the writer was persuaded that Jesus departed from the earth leaving his teaching very incomplete, but meaning to complete it from the heavenly world by communication of the Holy Spirit. And in some cases the completion of the teaching of Jesus consisted in the working out of an ideal life of him. “The Comforter shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I said unto you.” It was to this inward inspiration that the writer trusted for the revelation of the teaching of the earthly Jesus, as a supplement to the testimony of the Apostles. Thus in the Fourth Gospel we have credible and probably authentic accounts of many of the doings of Jesus: but in reporting the speeches of Jesus, the writer trusts less to tradition than to inspiration. Now we know that the highest inward inspiration does not always convey an exact knowledge of outward fact. No doubt many Christians will find this hard doctrine, which it needs some courage to accept. The author of the Fourth Gospel insists in many places on the value of truth, and no vice is more hateful to him than untruth. Lying is of Satan, who is the father of it. And Jesus is represented as saying that he was born into the world to bear witness to the truth. All this must remain profoundly unintelligible to us moderns, apart from the historic imagination. We have an ingrained notion as to the meaning of the word truth, which we find it hard to modify. To us what is true is what accords with the actual fact of sense. But it is quite clear that the author of the Fourth Gospel meant by truth something quite different, something more ideal and spiritual. No one who has the least sense of literary style can possibly suppose that Jesus talked in the way in which in the Fourth Gospel he is made to talk, unless the whole of the Synoptic writings are worthless. It cannot have been the object of the Evangelist to recover and set forth in a dry light the actual words which the disciples heard. His whole soul is bent on setting forth truth as he conceives it. But by truth he means conformity not to physical fact but to higher laws and relations. Truth is to him the suitable form and embodiment of a divine

revelation manifested in the world without and felt within. He embodies it in narrative, and in so doing, though he no doubt intends to adhere to history, yet he sometimes gives us a version of events which the canons of historic evidence compel us to reject. This is simply a case of changed intellectual atmosphere.<sup>1</sup>

Both Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel were passionately devoted to truth, as truth existed for them: that is to say, to the expression in terms of doctrine and of ideal history of the contents of the divine revelation which came to them, and which possessed them with absolute sway. They lived in communion with the spirit of their Master, and the spirit of their Master taught them the doctrine which became the life of the world, and saved Europe from utter destruction. As Paul has put it in immortal words, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him so no more."

When Mohammed was asked for a miracle, he replied that the miracle which he had to show was the Koran. Similarly, the greatest miracles of Christianity are the growth of the infant Church, the development of a religion destined to occupy the world, the production of such works as the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. These phenomena may not transgress the order of nature, yet they are in a real sense supernatural. They reveal the hand of God in human affairs; they belong to an order of things higher than that of daily life. The grain of mustard seed produced a tree beneath the shade of which all civilised nations have rested.

As it was in the time of St. Paul, so it has been in all later periods of the history of the Church. The spirit of Christ has never been extinguished in it. At times the inspiration has seemed to die down and to be almost smothered under the mass of materialism and superstition. But the torch has always been again lighted from above. Decay has been followed by revival. There have always been some in

<sup>1</sup> Compare Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, trans. i. 257. This writer shows that in the Bible generally the word ἀλήθεια, truth, is a translation of a Hebrew word which implies not so much truth to fact as rectitude of conduct, or even loyalty to a divine mission.

the Church who have lived in the life of Christ, and been his representatives on earth. Augustine and Francis, Luther and Wesley, have professed, like Paul, to derive their better life from a Master in Heaven; have lived in communion with an unseen lord. Such communion has not made them infallible as regards statements of fact; it has not even made them infallible in the matters of faith and morals, but it has made their lives part of the life of Christ in the world. The treasure is in earthen vessels, but it is still the treasure through all ages.

It is thus very unsatisfactory to shut off the earthly ministry of Jesus from the whole subsequent history of Christianity, and to try to appeal in matters of faith and doctrine solely to the Master on earth. The movement which began at the Nativity did not cease at the Crucifixion, but was only then raised to a higher level of life. Before, the Christian spirit had been manifesting itself to a few, and in a narrow field. After, the Christian spirit was facing the world, struggling with, mastering and absorbing, all sorts of beliefs and philosophies. Alike persons and institutions, alike customs and beliefs, had to be baptized into the name of Christ, to put off their old character and to put on a new character.

In the very early days of the Christian Church two streams met. In the one stream flowed the religion of Jesus, in the main a reformed and enlarged Judaism with but little admixture of the Gentile spirit, but penetrated through and through with the genius and the unrivalled personality of the Founder. In the other stream flowed the cosmopolitan religion, formed on a Greek basis out of the best beliefs and the deepest convictions of mankind. This stream had taken its rise far out of sight among the divine inspirations not lacking even to savage races, but growing clearer and more consistent with growing culture. India, Iran, Asia Minor, had contributed to it; but it had received its final form from philosophers and thinkers and religious reformers of Greece.

If the Ebionites of Jerusalem, the thoroughly Jewish Christians of the early Church, had triumphed over the Greek spirit, the religious history of the world would have been cut in two. The line of development of religion after Christ would

have taken quite a different direction from that which it had taken before Christ. This could not possibly be. At all events it did not come to pass. There was a great process of concretion. But the spirit which ruled and shaped the chaos was the spirit of Christ. By the aid of the continued inspiration of that spirit, the Church succeeded in assimilating and converting the substance of existing religion. Like a growing plant it took from air and soil all that was most nourishing, and converted it into its own substance. It no more created religion than the tree creates its own sap. And it did not accept Pagan ideas unmodified any more than the tree absorbs the foulness of manure or the decay of dead vegetation.

If the present work were a complete account of the rise of Christianity, our procedure would be to take one by one the great religious ideas current alike among Jews and Gentiles in the Hellenistic age, to show how they were modified and raised by the spirit of Christianity, and then admitted into the Church. We should have to trace them as they gave rise to ideal history, to prophecy, and to doctrine. We should watch them as they became embodied in church service and ceremony, as they gave the tone to organisation and blossomed out into art. To revert to our former image, we should have to trace the sap through the root, which is Christ, up the stem of the Church, into the leaves of thought, the flowers of art, and the fruit of works. But it is clear that so great a design could not be carried out in a single volume, nor by one author. We must closely limit our task if we mean to bring it to an end. And we do so by considering only the intellectual outgrowths which come from the informing idea—ideal history, prophecy, and doctrine. With the two former, as they make their appearance in early Christianity, we have already dealt briefly. Doctrine remains as the subject to which the rest of the present treatise must be devoted.

It is instructive summarily to compare the line which we propose to follow with that taken with regard to other parts of the early history of Christianity by writers who have a strong sense of the continuity of history. Mr. Hatch, for example, in his *Bampton Lectures*, has thus dealt with the organisation of the early Christian churches. His course was

less difficult, because it would be allowed on all hands that the early organisation of the Church was not the work of the life of Jesus. Beyond selecting as his companions the twelve Apostles, Jesus did almost nothing in the direction of determining the outward form to be taken by the society which he founded. But in the apostolic age the organisation of the Church rapidly took form by a process resembling crystallisation, and by the end of the second century it was practically completed. Yet the credit of the organisation cannot be given to any particular leader. It seemed to work itself out. It arose out of existing materials, being partly a continuation of the organisation of the synagogues of the Jewish Diaspora, and partly modelled on the usages of the civil and religious societies of the great Greek cities in Asia.

In much the same way doctrine arose, out of already existing elements, both Greek and Jewish. The formation of doctrine in the Church was a process parallel to the outward organisation of the Church. Here also the substance must be sought less in the teaching of the Founder than in the prevailing mental and moral conditions of the environment. Every fresh development and expression of doctrine had to make its way amid that environment. But the seed was yet of divine planting. And as that which is born of God overcometh the world, so the root principles of Christianity gradually moulded their environment to themselves. The mere fact that Christian truth took the form of doctrine shows that doctrine was the form necessary for it, the indispensable husk without which it could not be preserved. But, once more, doctrine developed amid the conditions of the first century could scarcely by any possibility be wholly suitable to the conditions of the present day. The body persists but the garments change. Or, rather, there is a continuity of life and of consciousness, but even the particles of the body, as well as the clothes which it wears, change entirely as time passes on.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

OUR knowledge of early Christian doctrine is of course derived from early Christian literature. It is necessary that I should state, before going further, the view on which this book proceeds in regard to the various documents of the early Church. That I should critically examine them in detail is out of the question; a brief statement must suffice. My desire has been cautiously to accept in regard to each literary document the verdict of the best criticism, taking what is certain as certain, and leaving aside, as far as possible, what is disputed.

There is an evident divergence in the directions which our investigation should take in regard to a professedly historic work like the *Acts*, and the Epistles of the Apostles and other writers. In the case of historic works, what we should decide, if we can, is their value as history. The date and authorship are important mainly as helping us to judge of the writer's opportunity for ascertaining facts and his personal bias. But in the case of letters and doctrinal discussions a question of the first importance is authenticity. Are they really the work of the author whose name they bear? If so, they are in any case of the greatest value as documents, giving us his personal opinions and beliefs. If, however, they are not authentic, the date and place of their appearance is still of some historic importance. They will show us what views were in vogue in the different periods and the several spheres of Christian growth.

Our only professed and continuous history of the apostolic

age is the *Acts of the Apostles*. This is allowed to be a work by the same author as the Third Gospel, whom we have already seen to be somewhat under the dominance of style, and inclined to care more for the ethical or ideal tendency of his narrative than for its accuracy as regards fact and chronology. In the *Acts* he has certainly used materials of very different degrees of value, as we shall presently see. The book falls naturally into two parts. Chapters i. to xii. set before us the history of the Church at Jerusalem down to the death of Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44. Chapters xiii. to xxviii. give an account of the missionary journeys of St. Paul down to his imprisonment at Rome.

There is one part of *Acts* which we can characterise without hesitation, the speeches. We have already seen that it was the ordinary custom of historians in antiquity to compose speeches for their characters. The writer of *Acts* was certainly no exception to the rule. His speeches are, it must be allowed, usually skilfully composed and adapted with a good deal of dramatic skill and mastery of style to the person who utters them; though one or two, like the long speech of Stephen, are somewhat pointless and tedious. We are, however, compelled to regard the statements made in the speeches of *Acts* as due in all cases to the author of the book, and not conclusive evidence for the views of the speaker into whose mouth they are put.

Most of the narrative we cannot bring to any decisive test, not having any parallel account from another source with which to compare it. In a few cases, however, we are able to make such comparison; and we are perfectly justified in supposing that what we cannot compare is usually on the same level of accuracy as the specimens which we can bring to the test.

In some instances there is a collision between statements of the writer of *Acts* and Josephus. For example, the circumstances of the death of Herod Agrippa are given differently by the two authorities. Again, according to Josephus the pretender Theudas made his appearance in the reign of Claudius, while the author of *Acts* inserts a reference to him in the speech of Gamaliel (v. 36), which is of ten years' earlier

date. So again the account given in Matthew of the death of Judas and the buying of the potter's field (xxvii. 3-10) is quite inconsistent with the account of the same events given at the beginning of the *Acts*. But it would scarcely be fair on such grounds as these to estimate the historic value of *Acts*, because it is possible that the account followed in *Acts* may be more trustworthy than that adopted by the rival historians. We are, however, on much safer ground when we can compare our writer with himself, or with historic documents the value of which cannot be disputed.

In the last verses of Luke's Gospel there is an account of the appearance of the risen Jesus to two disciples at Emmaüs. They at once (that very hour) hastened to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven gathered together; and as they told their tale, Jesus appeared in the midst. After partaking of food Jesus led the disciples out towards Bethany, where he was parted from them and carried up to heaven. All these events would occupy but a few hours.

In the first verses of *Acts* the same writer alludes to his Gospel, which he says carried on the history to the day when Jesus was received up. But he at once goes on to record a number of other appearances spread over a period of forty days. It is almost impossible to doubt that Luke had before him two inconsistent accounts of the Ascension, which he follows in turn without seriously trying to reconcile them, or to decide between them, one account making the Ascension follow close on the Resurrection, the other interposing a period of many weeks. To a modern reader this may seem strange; but every one used to the study of ancient historians could cite many parallel cases.

The circumstances of the conversion of St. Paul are narrated in three passages in *Acts*. In ix. 3 Paul is said to have seen a sudden light, and, falling to the earth, to have heard a voice speaking to him, while his companions stood by speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man. In xxvi. 13 we have substantially the same account, except that all the companions are said to have fallen to the ground also. In xxii. 9 we have a curious variety; the companions of Paul are said to have seen a light, but heard no voice. Of course

to a modern mind the first question which would arise as regards the whole matter is whether the vision was confined to the Apostle or witnessed by his companions. In the former case we should call it subjective; in the latter case it might claim objectivity. But it is clear that the writer of *Acts* had no notion that external testimony to the reality of the vision was important, and is quite careless as to what he says about Paul's companions; the only thing that interests him is the effect which it had on Paul himself. Of course it makes no difference whatever that one of the passages cited is from the narrative part of *Acts*, the other two from speeches attributed to Paul; for no one could maintain that these speeches are reported *verbatim*.

When Paul in his letters speaks of his vision of his Master, he uses quite general phrases; that he had seen the Lord, that God had been pleased to reveal his Son in him, and the like. With him the line between spiritual experience and historic fact to be established by testimony is as vague as to the writer of *Acts*.

As regards the external events of the life of St. Paul in the time which followed his conversion, there is irreconcilable divergency between the narrative in *Acts* and Paul's own letter to the Galatians. It is unnecessary to go farther into this matter. It is discussed, usually with the intention of reconciling irreconcilable contradictions, in a host of works. The main facts are to be found in the article "Acts" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. To any one who goes into the authorities in a historic frame of mind it becomes clear, either that Paul had persuaded himself to accept a version of his own life far from the facts, or else that the author of *Acts* was very imperfectly acquainted with the life of the Apostle, or very indifferent as to historic accuracy.

The true character of the narrative, at all events in the earlier part of *Acts*, appears perhaps most clearly from an examination of the account there given of the events of the day of Pentecost. We are told that on that day, after flames of fire had fallen from heaven and settled on the Apostles, they began to speak to the strangers in Jerusalem, each in his own language. The gift of tongues here appears as a

clear miracle, as the direct bestowal on the Apostles of a power of speaking in languages which they had never learned or studied. But the power of speaking with tongues, a common gift in the early Church, did not enable its possessor to speak in foreign languages, but to speak in an exalted or ecstatic fashion. From 1 *Corinthians* xiv. we learn all about the power; and we find that he who spoke with tongues needed an interpreter, or he could not be understood. The custom of speaking in an ecstasy and unintelligibly has often arisen among enthusiastic societies in various ages of the Church; it is a well-known phenomenon of religious revivals. It would appear then that the author of *Acts* or his authorities must have misinterpreted an ordinary phenomenon of religious enthusiasm into a purely miraculous gift from above. Tradition and idealisation have gradually broidered the events of nascent Christianity, until they stand quite out of relation to the experience of the Church.

There are, no doubt, certain parts of *Acts* which stand on a higher level as regards credibility. The latter part of the book has far greater claims to be regarded as historical than the earlier part. And in particular the passages which evidently derive from one of the companions of St. Paul in his travels, in which the word *we* continually occurs, have a decided air of truth and comparative accuracy. Some critics in Holland<sup>1</sup> have been so strongly impressed by the character of this narrative, that they have elevated it into being the main authority for the life and teaching of Paul. And finding the impression of the Apostle which it conveys to be not wholly consistent with the contents of the Epistles of Paul, they have ventured to reject these latter as unauthentic works of a later age. These views are confined to a small and extreme school. The ordinary reader can clearly see that whereas the Epistles take us into the very heart and conscience of Paul, the *we* narrative only brings before us his outward circumstances and his actions. Nevertheless it is a document of great value, and the recent writings of Professor Ramsay, which deal with St. Paul as a traveller and a citizen of Rome,

<sup>1</sup> A concise account of this curious aberration in criticism will be found in A. Meyer's *Moderne Forschung über die Geschichte des Urchristentums*, p. 14.



have helped to vindicate its accuracy and authenticity. Mr. Ramsay is very successful in showing that the author of this narrative was well acquainted with the geography, the political conditions, the social organisation of the country traversed by Paul. But obviously this does not directly prove the narrative to be in all points accurate. And in fact, in the heart of the *we* narrative we have some accounts, such as that of the earthquake at Philippi, which we are by no means justified in accepting as unvarnished history.

Whether the author of the *we* narrative is also the compiler of the whole book of *Acts* is a disputed point. This compiler, whoever he may have been, undoubtedly used a variety of material, good and bad, the *we* narrative being certainly the best. This material he moulds and adapts to a purpose which can still be traced. In a previous chapter, when speaking of Christian miracle, we found a remarkable parallelism between the miracles assigned by the author of *Acts* to Paul and those which he assigns to Peter. The same parallelism runs through all the book. It was maintained by the school of Tübingen that the author of *Acts* intended his work to be an eirenicon, and to bring nearer together the ultra-Jewish section of the Church, which had its centre in Palestine, and the Gentile Churches, mostly of Pauline foundation. Whether there was in the mind of the author of *Acts* any conscious purpose of this kind has since been doubted. But the tendency of his work, whether consciously pursued or not, is certainly peace-making. The relations between James and Peter and other leaders of the Hebraic section of the Church, and the great Apostle of the Gentiles, are made smoother than from the Pauline letters they would seem to have been in fact. Peter and Paul are exhibited as the morning and evening star of the Church, seldom visible together, but each beautiful and appropriate in his own sphere. This task of reconciliation is eminently suited to the beautiful spirit of the writer of the Third Gospel. Although the school of Tübingen made too much of the clashing of Jew and Gentile tendency in the Church, yet no one can deny that such clashing took place, or that the Catholic Church is based, as Rome has always maintained, on the joint labours and teaching of Peter and Paul.

It seems that the conscious or unconscious purposes of the author of *Acts*, and his views as to the special missions of his heroes, tend greatly to colour and even to mould his narrative. As Professor Ramsay allows, he was indifferent to chronology. As M. Renan shows, he cared infinitely less for fact and accuracy than for tendency and ideas. If he wrote the third Gospel he was of gentle, spiritual, almost feminine, temperament, with a liking for the miraculous, and a strong prejudice against wealth and station. Also he was endowed with much literary taste and skill, so that he became an artist in words almost unconsciously. On the whole, then, whatever value may attach to *Acts* as our only narrative of early church history, and however truly it may reflect the surroundings amid which Christianity began its growth, yet we cannot regard the book as very satisfactory from the modern historical point of view.

The Pauline letters are works of a very different kind, an incomparable reflex of one of the most interesting personalities that ever lived, an impression taken direct from a heart which beat only for the Church and the Head of the Church. Apart from these letters our knowledge of early Christianity would be indeed weak and faint. With them we may fairly say that there is scarcely any personage of ancient history so well known to us as Paul, and that by their influence on Paul we can best judge of his contemporaries. There is only one source of doubt and hesitation as we dwell on these incomparable documents: the doubt how far they are authentic. In the present work, which deals with all the phenomena of infant Christianity in a slight and general way, this question is not nearly so important as it would be to a historian of detail. Yet it must be faced. I can only set down here the views as to the various letters ascribed to Paul which are accepted in the present work. They are not in the least original: in fact I have only endeavoured to ascertain what is the general result of the most judicial criticism.

The Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians (1st and 2nd) and Galatians are primary. Their authenticity is practically undisputed. They are absolutely full of inspiration and of character, personal, glowing. They offer us a mine of infor-

mation as to the author himself, the circumstances of the Church, the tendencies of early Christianity. They are historic authorities in the strictest sense; though of course they can only bring before us history as mirrored in the mind of Paul, not history in an objective sense. Paul, like all his Jewish contemporaries, cared but little for accuracy of detail, and regarded spiritual truth as of incomparably more importance than material facts. He read the past in the light of personal experience, and saw the present with eyes more sensitive to good and evil, to tendencies and hopes, than to precise outline. He was in fact an Apostle and not a historian.

The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians cannot be with the same confidence attributed to Paul; and even the critics who regard them as Pauline often find in them interpolations by other hands. They certainly represent a different side of Paulinism from that most prominent in the Roman and Galatian Epistles. It has been disputed whether this change of view is the result of passing years in Paul himself, or whether it arises because these later letters were from the hand not of the Apostle but of a follower. That they would be in the latter case, technically speaking, forgeries, is a truth which need not too strongly influence our judgment, since in those days it was not regarded as immoral or dishonest to bring out a work of one's own under the ægis of a respected name. Nevertheless criticism seems now disposed to allow the Pauline origin of the core of these Epistles. Fully accepting this view, I have felt at liberty to use the Epistles freely as representing in general the later views of the great Apostle. Even if they do not give us the views of Paul, they give us those of his immediate followers: a thing almost equally important.

The Pastoral Epistles which bear the name of Paul must be used with greater caution. Certain passages in them, especially the salutations and personal messages, such as that about the cloak left at Troas, have a very real air; and some recent German critics think that these passages may be taken from actual letters of Paul. But the majority of learned critics think that the kind of organisation which the letters to Timothy and Titus imply as existing in the churches, must belong to a

later time than that of Paul. The question is one with which the present book is little concerned. To the historian of Christian institutions it is most important to determine whether the office of bishop had arisen in the Pauline Churches before the time of Nero. But we are here concerned not with organisation but with doctrine. And as the Pastoral Epistles contain no trace of the doctrine of apostolic succession, or of the doctrine of episcopal supremacy, as developed by Iguatius and Irenæus, they do not properly come within our scope. It would certainly not be justifiable to use detached passages of them as evidence of the views of Paul on any subject.

The authenticity of the Epistles of James and Peter (1st) has been much in dispute in recent years. The reason for doubting whether James the brother of Jesus wrote the epistle assigned to him lies mainly in the want of satisfactory ancient attestation. It reflects the views of that party among the Jews which had received Christianity but can scarcely be said to have assimilated it; of which party James seems to have been the leader. 1st *Peter*, on the other hand, is referred to the Apostle by abundant ancient testimony. If it is genuine, it shows that Peter towards the end of his life accepted a theology closely akin to the Pauline. In itself this is improbable; but we are dealing with a period in which the improbable was constantly occurring.

Besides Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel, the only important speculative theologian of the New Testament is the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Here, however, there is no question of authenticity, since the Epistle is anonymous. It represents a notable tendency of thought in early Christianity, the tendency to cling to the Old Testament, but to interpret it in a spiritual and symbolical rather than a literal fashion, in the light of the Christian faith. We may fairly say that whereas other writers of the New Testament cited the earlier Scriptures as a Jewish witness, the writer of *Hebrews* has Christianised them, baptized them into the faith. Who this writer may have been is altogether uncertain. He was certainly a Jew who wrote mainly for his countrymen. Yet he shows many traces of Pauline influence. He comes before us merely as an inspired voice speaking in the early

Christian community, and bridging the abyss which separated the Hebrew religion of the ancient world from the new Christianity.

Outside the canonic writings of the New Testament there are some treatises of the apostolic age which are of great importance in the history of belief and doctrine. Among these the most valuable is the *Didachê* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, first published by the Archbishop Bryennius in 1883. It is an anonymous work, dating from the latter part of the first, or the early part of the second century. It is of extraordinary simplicity and sincerity, and fills up a great gap in our knowledge by furnishing us with a summary of the ritual accepted in many Judæo-Christian circles which stood outside the influence of Paul and his school. Perhaps the greatest of the advantages possessed by the book is that it comes to us fresh, and not overlaid with the commentaries and controversies of centuries. We can look at it in a natural and historic fashion, apart from theological preconceptions; and for that reason it has had and is having great influence upon all theologians and church historians who are open to evidence and to reason. In particular, it proves how great variety in practice and in doctrine prevailed in the first century of the history of Christianity; and how far from the mark are those ecclesiastical historians who fancy that the Christian Church had from the first a definite organisation and a fixed body of doctrine.

The apostolic or sub-apostolic fathers, such as Barnabas and Clement, are not of great importance to us. The question whether the writings attributed to them are authentic is the less important because those writings do not bear the impress of commanding personality or of intellectual greatness. Ignatius is a more impressive figure; and there has been, as is well known, a prolonged and heated controversy as to the authenticity of the various letters which bear his name. An English writer can scarcely do otherwise than accept, in this matter, the verdict of Dr. Lightfoot.<sup>1</sup> But Dr. Lightfoot is careful to emphasize the fact that though the Ignatian epistles set great store by the episcopal office, they contain no trace of

<sup>1</sup> Well summarised by Cruttwell, *Literary History*, i. 80.



the notion of apostolic succession, nor do they speak of episcopacy as a divine ordinance. The position of the bishop rests on social and ecclesiastical rather than doctrinal grounds. Dr. Lightfoot observes that "no distinct traces of sacerdotalism are visible in the ages immediately after the Apostles."<sup>1</sup> The sacerdotal tendency appears not in Ignatius, nor in Irenæus, but for the first time in Tertullian, who lived at a period later than that of which we treat.

One other class of writers must be mentioned, the Apologists, such as Aristides and Justin, who brought before the great Emperors of the second century reasons why they should tolerate, or even encourage, the faith of Christ, or tried to vindicate to Pagan readers the claims of their religion. The great value of these apologies lies in the fact that they were primarily intended, not for the edification of the faithful, but for consideration by heathens and statesmen. They therefore present a more objective and cool-headed view of Christianity than do the writings intended only for Christians. They help us to see the religion more in the light in which it would appear to philosophic bystanders. As we know very little of these Apologists from other sources, the question whether the works ascribed to them are rightly attributed is unimportant; the historic value of those works lies entirely in their point of view and the manner in which they reflect the religious controversies of the age.

Such, in brief, is the literature on which we mainly depend for the history and the ideas of the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages. It is terribly defective. To compose anything like a true historic picture of the period, we should need, in addition to the works which have come down to us, a mass of those which have perished. Our materials are hopelessly one-sided. The writings of the important Christian teachers who happened to be branded as heretical have mostly perished, or are only preserved to us in the fragmentary and misleading quotations of the controversialists who attempted to refute them. Of the religious systems which had the closest relations to Christianity, the Mithraic, Orphic, and Isiac faiths, we can gain with all our diligence but a most imperfect notion; so that of the inter-

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, pp. 211, 217, 219.

action of influence between them and the nascent Church we can scarcely judge at all. Monks without literary conscience, and with a keen nose for unorthodoxy, have been our librarians, and have handed down to us only what they judged to tend to edification.

Happily, within the last few years an entirely new and invaluable source of knowledge has begun to flow, or at least to drip. Researches in the monasteries of the East, and excavations in the tombs of Egypt, have in late years restored to us a few priceless records of early Christianity, of the very class which the formed prejudices of mediæval Christianity had adjudged to destruction. If this source of knowledge becomes more prolific, it is possible that archæology may in some degree redress the balances of history, and that our conceptions of the early Church may grow nearer to fact and to human nature. We may cease to feel, when we turn in imagination to the first two centuries of Christianity, as if we were wandering in a bazaar of objects of piety. We may learn to discard the crude notion that the history of the early Church consists of a series of victorious campaigns of the depositaries of infallible truth against the cruel worshippers of idols without, and the opposition of foolish and wicked heretics within. And in so doing, the human race will make as decided progress as it made when our fathers gave up the belief in a six days' creation by an external anthropomorphic deity, and accepted instead the belief in a continuous evolutionary force working from within, but not therefore necessarily freed from divine control and direction.

## CHAPTER XXV

### IDEA AND DOCTRINE

WE have seen<sup>1</sup> how ethical myths in their decay give way not only to history, parable, and prophecy, but also to doctrine. History, parable, and prophecy have to do with the conditions of the present sensuous world. Doctrine has to do not with that world but with the spiritual world which lies in and beneath it. Doctrine is assertion as to the deeper nature of man, or of the spiritual powers with which man has intercourse. It is not usually an assertion of fact, although based upon fact, but it is a reflection upon the heavens arched above us of an image of man's profounder and more lasting life.

In an earlier chapter (IV) I examined the genesis of doctrine from the individual and psychological point of view. I then maintained that it was an intellectual embodiment of the supersensual experiences of men. The inward feeling that a divine power urges man towards righteousness is the true experiential basis of the doctrine that God is good. And there is a similar basis of experience to other more special doctrines such as those of the forgiveness of sins, the divine providence, and the efficacy of prayer.

There may appear to be some inconsistency in making doctrine at once the corollary of experience and the embodiment of an idea. But the inconsistency is only apparent. If we had based doctrine on any sensuous or outward experience, then undoubtedly we should have taken a view quite inconsistent with its embodying ideas. But inner or

<sup>1</sup> Above, Chap. X.

spiritual experience is, in its whole character, quite different from that which comes of sense and observation. It lies in the land of ideas, of communication between man and the higher Power. Thus that which is to the individual an experience appears in the history of the race as the dawning of an idea. To use the mathematical expression, the one is a statical, the other a dynamical explanation of the same group of phenomena.

The experiences which lie at the basis of religious doctrine are not, as has been already pointed out, those of the barbarian, but those of civilised men. But they are clearly not for that reason less safe and trustworthy. And even among barbarians we may commonly find them in an embryonic form. The tree grows among primitive men, but it bears wild fruit, and needs pruning and tending before it will bring forth produce fit to sustain the life of cultivated man. Thus, when we look to history, we find the divine ideas by slow degrees working their way into the ethical life of man, and by degrees adapting to higher purposes thought and customs which were often in origin unmoral and unattractive. And so doctrine is gradually formulated, not by any sudden revelation, but by the gradual penetration of man's thought as to his spiritual surroundings by ideas.

Doctrine looked at in this relative light is seen to be in logical order, and sometimes in actual descent, a successor of myth. This may perhaps be made clearer if we take two or three instances from Hellas and from Judæa.

One of the chief seats of religious doctrine in Greece was Eleusis, the ancient seat of the Mysteries of Demeter and Cora. Whatever may have been the origin of those Mysteries, an origin almost hidden in the mists of the past,<sup>1</sup> the Eleusinian celebration was in later classical times permeated by the sense of the life beyond the grave, and at every recurrence of the festival hundreds of men and women crowded thither in the hope of a surer trust in the possible victory over death. I speak of a *sense* of an undying life, rather than of a *belief* in a future life, because it is the sense which comes first, and is the

<sup>1</sup> I may refer to the 24th chapter of Mr. Jevons' *Introduction to the History of Religion* for an excellent discussion of this matter.

basis alike of belief and of doctrine. This sense that man does not belong merely to the world of time and space is a permanent fact of human nature, visible in the lives of thousands in all ages. And the permanent fact seeks an explanation; the sense requires an embodiment in myth or in doctrine. In the first place, it seized upon and appropriated to itself some of the most beautiful of early Greek myths, the carrying away of Cora, the passionate grief of her goddess mother, and her restoration every year to the upper air: myths which originally were doubtless connected with the physical phenomenon of the annual springing of the corn, but which were transplanted from that connection into a more mystic and spiritual realm. And the same sense of an undying life worked out for itself at Eleusis a doctrinal expression. There was never at the Mysteries an authorised creed; the Greek priests were fonder of image and feeling than of an intellectual structure of faith. But we can easily imagine a convinced votary of the two goddesses saying, "I believe in the life beyond death, in the realm of Hades and august Persephone, in a land where vice will be punished, and virtue meet with a fitting reward." Such a creed was at least implicit in the celebration of the Mysteries; and it underlies the words of poets and philosophers when they speak with emotion of Eleusis.

In the writings of the Greek poets we find doctrine often alternating with myth. I have already observed that presumption was a vice as to which the Greek conscience was very sensitive, and which gave rise to or took possession of many Hellenic myths. But it also found abundant expression in statements which are strictly doctrinal, as in Sophocles' lines:<sup>1</sup> "Zeus hates beyond measure the boastings of a lofty tongue." Here the mention of Zeus and the attribution to him of anger and hatred is doctrinal. The experience was that punishment followed presumption, but that experience needed to be expressed in terms comprehensible to those who accepted the Greek Pantheon.

Doctrine in Greece was largely concerned with the life after death and the condition of the departed. Here we may

<sup>1</sup> *Antigone*, 128.



observe one doctrinal view succeeding another. This is clearly seen in the case of the Athenian slayers of the tyrant Hipparchus, the friends Harmodius and Aristogeiton. There were no names on which Attic piety dwelt more lovingly than on theirs. Immediately after the expulsion of Hipparchus' brother Hippias, and the rest of the tyrant's brood, the feasts of the liberated Athenians re-echoed to the drinking song which told how Harmodius was not dead but lived in the Islands of the Blest, with Achilles and other heroes of old time. But the Islands of the Blest passed into the background of the Greek pious imagination, being superseded in general belief by the groves of Persephone in Hades. Hence at a later time we find the orator Hyperides dwelling on the men of renown who await in Hades the coming of Leosthenes and those who fell with him in battle, and among them a conspicuous place is taken by the illustrious dead heroes Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Thus we trace in the course of two centuries the formation of two successive doctrines as to the abode of the tyrant-slayers, which was placed earlier in the western islands, and later in the Kingdom of Persephone, which lies beneath our feet.

What a belief in the future life was to the best of the Greeks, that to the Jews was the sense of the religious mission of their race. This sense dominates their literature, and gives birth alike to myth and to the various outgrowths of myth whereof I have spoken. Pure myth is found in abundance in the earlier chapters of *Genesis*, but with the appearance of Abraham it gives place to what looks like history. This history is penetrated through and through by motive and moral, though the Jews did no doubt think of Abraham and his family as really existent ancestors of their own. And the same sense of a national calling and inspiration gives birth to abundant parables in the Prophets, such as the touching parallel sketched by Hosea between Israel and an unfaithful wife. It also in *Daniel* produces magnificent prophecies of the fall of the great kingdoms of the Gentiles, and their supersession by a renovated and purified Israel. What, however, we are at the moment in search of is an embodiment of the same feeling more directly to the intellect in the form of doctrine or dogma. This is not far to seek; it is indeed

familiar to us all in those magnificent chapters of the later Isaiah, which are among the noblest expressions of religious feeling ever uttered. "Doubtless Thou art our Father," writes the prophet; "Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer." The divine sonship of Israel was the best doctrinal statement of his mission. And the character of that mission itself is set forth in other passages of the same writer, especially in the chapter beginning "Who hath believed our report," in words which are commonly applied, and justifiably, by Christians to the Founder of their faith, yet which in their origin had a different reference.

Though religious doctrine may often directly succeed religious myth, as its more complete and intellectual expression, yet it would not of course be possible to maintain that in all or in most cases this takes place. In fact, doctrine usually belongs to a far later, more self-conscious, and more articulate stage of human society than does myth. In the mythical age the religious experiences which give rise to doctrine are not clearly realised. In Greece, where myth was abundant, higher religious experience was the endowment, not of the masses among whom myth arose, but of the few who turned from popular religion to philosophy. The constructed myths or parables of Plato stand much nearer to later religious ideas than do the myths of Zeus or Apollo. And in Judæa, where the religious faculties were keen, there was from early times a tendency to express religious experience rather in ideal history than in myth, though of course the line between myth and ideal history is very hard to draw. Thus the sequence of religious doctrine to religious myth, though logically correct, cannot in many cases be made out. And it is better, in tracing the growth of doctrine, not to be too anxious to affiliate it to known myth.

In order briefly to illustrate the gradual evolution of doctrine by the inward working of a divine idea, or, in other words, by the growth of perception of the relation of the human to the divine, I will sketch the history of three of the stems of religious doctrine. I select in preference such stems of doctrine as do not belong at all specially to Christianity, but to all religions worthy of the name. Let us consider the

habit of prayer, the necessity of purification, and the desire of salvation.

Let us first briefly regard the history of prayer, not of course with any of the completeness which either the scientific theologian or the anthropologist would feel to be necessary, but in mere outline.

Prayer is said to be unknown to many debased tribes, which believe in the existence around them of disembodied spirits, but do not attempt to hold communication with them. However this be, it is certain that among many peoples at a very low stage of civilisation it is the custom to address petitions to earth-spirits or deceased ancestors, often undistinguishable from such spirits, and to ask of them success in war, or in the chase, fine weather, or smooth waves, increase of crops, of flocks and herds, or of children: any of those boons which are most necessary to the existence and the prosperity of savages.

In its origin prayer does not seem to have any ethically religious bearing at all; it is purely egotistic and quite unmoral. But by degrees there enter into it the germs of higher possibilities. In this case, as is so often the case in biological evolution, organism fitted to bear a higher meaning and to serve a loftier purpose makes its appearance long before that meaning and that purpose are visible. The brain of the savage is far more complicated than his simple life requires, and his hand is an instrument far more delicate than he can use to full advantage. In the same way his appeal to surrounding spiritual powers may be a superstition; but it is calculated to serve in time as the means of a far higher development and the vehicle of a far loftier life than any with which he is acquainted. Spiritual prayer, one of the highest functions of the noblest men, could not have found a vehicle had the savage not learned to venerate dead ancestors, and to address them in tones of entreaty.

Prayer being once established as an institution becomes with time the vehicle in which works from age to age the divine idea of the surrender of the will of man to the will of God. At first sight it seems very ill-adapted for such a purpose. It seems adapted rather to be the instrument of the

self-assertion of the will of the individual, bending to its own purposes the powers even of the spiritual world. And no doubt strong egotistic purpose is in many lands the mark of prayer, and survives in more civilised countries among those addicted to sorcery and witchcraft, who think that repeated prayers confer on those who offer them not only a degree of absolute merit, but also actual power over the spirits, to bend them to human will. Unless the Power which works for righteousness were real and living, this tendency would be the natural and inevitable result of the custom of praying. But this tendency in the course of history comes into collision with a force far stronger than itself. Men come into the presence of the powers of the unseen world in simple egotism; but they are subdued and converted; and they learn that there is a higher good than that after which they were striving, and a purpose in their lives beyond the mere desire of self-gratification.

Nor is it only among the higher races and in the history of the nobler religions that we may discern such workings. The barbarous Khonds of Orissa<sup>1</sup> sometimes end their long-drawn prayers with the words, "We are ignorant of what it is good to ask for. You know what is good for us. Give it to us." And at a somewhat higher stage the words "for us" will drop out, and men will ask for what is good not merely for the asker, but for others and for mankind.

With the continued practice of prayer, the egotism which demands good for one's self and the natural affection which demands gratifications for one's relations and friends, though they do not die away, pass more or less into the background. Man learns that the higher the tone of his request, the more sure it is to be granted; and thus there slowly dawns upon him the conception of a divine will which wills what is best. He learns to pray rather for delivery from the *fear* of his enemies than for delivery out of the *hand* of his enemies: from the fear of death rather than from dying. He seeks inner changes rather than mere outward interpositions. And as this conception becomes more and more concrete and objective, man perceives more and more that his highest

<sup>1</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, ii. p. 369.

wisdom and happiness is to conform his own will to that which is divine. Then prayers become less a series of petitions than a communion with the unseen. Instead of trying to gain what he wishes, man learns to try to conform his wishes to the will of God, revealed to him day by day and felt by him to embody the ideal life. And so some of the philosophers, even before the Christian era, had anticipated that prayer of "Thy will be done" which must remain always the highest form of the address of man to his Maker.

Another of the great ethical-religious ideas which may be traced through a hundred manifestations in the evolution of society is that of purity. In this case also we start with what has little moral meaning. Ceremonial purifications in connection with the worship of gods and dæmons are found among all nations, even the lowest. They are quite distinct from, and have scarcely any connection with, hygienic regulations. Their main motive is that man needs preparation, needs to lay aside the stains of ordinary daily life before he is fit to approach the spiritual powers of the world. Even among savages this idea prompts frequently to practices of violent asceticism; the initiation of a youth among the aborigines of America or Australia will often bring him to the verge of death. In the enthusiastic cults of the ancient nations of Asia Minor and Syria this passion for purity, mixed in a strange fashion with elements of licentiousness, prompted the votaries of Cybele and Sabazius and Mithras to self-mutilation, as the readiest and most obvious means of attaining what was desired.

It was by slow degrees that there worked through the desire of ceremonial purity the discovery that the gods desired a purity which was inward. The Hebrew prophet has given this feeling expression in the words, "Cleanse your hearts and not your garments." And in the writings of Plato we find assertions that it is an inner and not an outward purification which makes a man fit to come into the presence of God.

As in the case of prayer, so in that of purity: the evolution is by no means strictly chronological. As in the history of heathendom, so in the history of Christianity: there has always been a struggle between the lower and the higher



rendering. The great majority of Christians still look upon ceremonial preparations as necessary for an acceptable approach to God. And no good whatever comes from a mere attack upon their beliefs. It is better that their religion should lie mainly in what is visible and material than that it should give way to an empty scepticism. The idea is ever working, and it is far better for mankind that its acceptance should be made easier by the existence of a materialist vehicle for its reception. Without some vehicle it could never have come on terms with human life at all.

In the third place we may consider the history of the idea of salvation. It may to some appear a paradox to say that the doctrine of salvation is by no means especially Christian. But such is the simple historic fact. Christianity has given a tinge of its own to the doctrine, but it has existed from very early times, and among most civilised or half-civilised peoples.

The saving which the barbarian asks of his ghostly deities is no doubt primarily a materialistic one: that the arrows of his foes may not reach him, and that the pestilence may not enter his house. But it is very certain that barbarians are by no means pure materialists. They are acutely conscious of the presence of immaterial powers which help and which endanger not only the life of the body but that of the spirit. Hence they resort to medicine-men, seeking some spell or incantation which may serve them as a talisman to ward off the attacks of ghostly foes. But there is one time of special need. When a man's soul quits its mortal tenement to set out on a journey to the land of shades, it is in a very special degree open to the attacks of malign spirits. The power which at that moment can shield the shuddering soul is indeed a power which brings it salvation.

In the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece the doctrine of the future life had a great part. And that which was especially promised to the votaries was protection on the road of the spirits from the evil powers which infested it. On this subject we have more to say in the next chapter. Superstitious as were the doctrines, and uncleanly as were the observances of the obscure sects of later Greece, we yet owe to them what is on the whole a higher turn given to many of

the conceptions familiar to the Greek mind. In the classical literature and the public inscriptions of Greece the words *σώζειν* and *σωτήρ* nearly always refer to material preservation and safety; but the societies which venerated Sabazius and Sarapis and Mithras believed in a safety and salvation which were at least of a more inward and spiritual kind, and sought these by frequent prayers and devotions.

Any one who consults a concordance of the Bible can see how the meaning of the word *save* changes and rises as one passes from the Pentateuch and the historical books of the Old Testament to the Psalms and Isaiah. In the earlier stages of Israel's history it has a predominantly worldly and temporal meaning: at a later time the salvation longed for by the inspired writers is not merely worldly but spiritual, involving a right relation to God, and a consequent state in one's self.

Among Christians we find all three of the renderings of the word *save* in use, the lower, the middle, and the higher meaning. Some most earnestly desire safety from foes and the mischances of life. Some most frequently and most ardently desire the salvation of their souls after death from the flames of hell and the power of Satan. The more spiritual schools of Christianity rather lay stress on the need of salvation from one's own worse self and from the terrible power of evil habit. The lines of pre-Christian hope and feeling are carried on; but the Christian differs from the Pagan and the Jew because he hopes to receive that kind of salvation which he most desires from his Saviour in heaven.

The developments which spring from an idea in any age depend on the outward conditions of that age. What kind of doctrine arises from it depends mainly upon the intellectual atmosphere; what kind of ceremony and art it originates depends upon social condition and the habits of daily life. The same idea may bear quite different fruits under varying circumstances of soil and atmosphere. And to trace the idea through the manifestation requires great ability and imagination, requires the exercise of the highest gifts of historical insight.

It is, however, harder still to discern any law in the suc-

cession of the ideas themselves. They come from the unknown regions of the ideal into human life ; their source is inscrutable to the intellect of man. Sometimes in studying the history of the past we seem to discern something of their order ; but the nearer we come to our own times the more it baffles us. This, however, does seem to be true, that none of the great ideas of religion after being once revealed to the world ever passes wholly away. It grows or decays among us, but it does not disappear.

In so far as doctrine is the immediate expression in terms of intellect of the ultimate realities of religious experience, it remains true for all men and all time. Such theses as that God is one and that God is merciful belong to all worthy religions, and no one can deny them without offending religion itself. But such statements as these, though they are the backbone of *la religion*, make up but a small part of *les religions*. Every form of faith which has power and acceptance among men adds to the bare framework of that religion which is immediately verifiable. Colour and form are necessary that religion should appeal not merely to the heart and experience, but to thought and imagination.

So among the great historic religions, systems of doctrine have arisen which rest more or less on the ground of experience, but which build on that ground and on real or supposed historic fact vast temples of interdependent beliefs and theories mounting towards heaven, and liable to decay, and likely to be thrown down by the shocks of time.

The development of a scheme of doctrine is seldom the work of one of those great religious leaders who make epochs in human history. But after such leaders have broken the way and prepared the ground, doctrines arise among their successors and disciples. And they are really formed in a far less degree than the formers suppose out of the original teaching of the founders, and in a far greater degree out of the pre-existing material which lies to hand in the religious beliefs of the age and the existing tendencies of the awakened enthusiasm.

In spite of all difficulties inherent in the formulation of doctrine, doctrine must be formulated. There are periods of

enthusiasm ; but enthusiasm cannot last for ever in any community. While the enthusiasm lasts men despise all worldly considerations and act only for the glory of God. And at the same time they are ready to make light of the needs of intellect, to make religious zeal all in all, and to despise mere knowledge. But these powerful movements sooner or later lose their first energy, and the stream of life sinks to its old level. Then the existing and dominant religious ideas of the community, which for a time seemed to be overwhelmed by the flood of new life and feeling, gradually emerge, and have to be accommodated in the new scheme of religion. Philosophy has to be conciliated. Also mundane impulses and desires begin to prevail against those of the higher life ; so that the religious guides of mankind feel compelled to make compromises, and to make allowances among their followers for the calls of human nature. Then also, and for the same reasons, a corresponding allowance has to be made to the intellect. Religious knowledge has by some means or other to be put upon terms with ordinary secular knowledge. Men feel the strain of living in two worlds at once too great for them to bear, and they try to reduce the two worlds to some common ground.

Then comes the necessity of clear definitions, of exact statements, of a scheme of the universe framed from the new point of view, and capable of being defended against the philosophic assaults of those who maintain the old order of things. Doctrine arises. The burning flow of teaching cools like the lava from a volcano, and covers the earth with a new and fertile soil. It may be that the new movement had not sufficient intellectual force and rational basis to develop a new system of thought. In that case it is doomed at once to pass away. Men will not and cannot accept in cold blood what does not satisfy their intellects. If feeling decays and leaves behind it no solid legacy of thought, then the world is as if that feeling had never been, and falls back at once into its old ways.

If, however, the new movement has enough vital force to frame a satisfactory scheme of the world, it may grow and flourish. It was thus with Christianity. In a few generations

the labours of successive doctors of the Church had worked out a detailed scheme of doctrine. This scheme was adopted by the governing hierarchy of the Church, and so became, instead of doctrine, dogma sanctioned by authority: and this dogmatic system met and wrestled with Neo-Platonism and Epicurism and the other theories of the universe then in vogue. Not that the conflict was altogether decided by mere logical fencing. Intensity of belief and nobility of life go for something even in intellectual contests. But unless Christianity had presented to the thinking part of mankind a system of the world and of human life which they felt to be higher and truer than others, it must have failed to make its way. For if the emotions are the sails of life, the intellect is the rudder; and we know whether sails or rudder in the end have their way with the ship. Successive generations of thinkers from Paul to Thomas Aquinas built up a great system of Christian doctrine, which was for many ages regarded as satisfactory to the best human intellects.

For man is not a loosely-tied bundle of faculties, but a compound being with unity of feeling. Religion is more closely connected with emotion and action than with thought: yet if we love religion we must think about it. And if we think about it at all, it is of the utmost importance to think about it rightly, or at least as rightly as is possible to faculties so narrowly limited as ours. And if we speak about it we must speak about it in words, however incomplete or even misleading be the terms we are compelled to use.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### CHRISTIANITY AND THE THIASI

THERE comes sometimes in the lives of individuals a great crisis, of which the result is that all the rest of their days is lived on another and a higher level; childhood in purpose and will is changed for maturity. It was such a change as this which passed over religion in the days of the early Church. Though the main principles of religious faith existed before Christianity, they were suddenly raised by the Founder of that religion and his immediate disciples on to a new and a higher level, which they thenceforward more or less maintain. All the great beliefs of the human race were, like the early disciples themselves, baptized into the name of Christ, and thereby consecrated to a new and a better life.

In part this was the result of the teaching of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, in the Parables, in the sayings reported in our Gospels, we find a body of lore as to the spiritual life and the relations between man and God, compared with which all previous teaching on the subject seems poor and barren. Even the noblest of earlier works in regard to the higher life, such as the Hebrew Psalms, or the writings of Plato, seem, when set by the side of the Synoptic discourses, like the speech of children compared with the utterances of wise maturity. These discourses are like a mine, and, since the days of their first utterance, have furnished divine wisdom to thousands of searchers, and still contain unsounded depths of treasure for the generations which are to come.

But, as Christendom has from the first been aware, there

was much more in the personality of Jesus than in his words. In some fashion which we can but very imperfectly trace, the life and spirit of the Founder of Christianity passed into his disciples, raising them to an altogether new level. When he was taken from them they did not relapse into peasants of Galilee, but carried on the campaign which ended in the conquest of the world. In the writings of Paul and the Fourth Gospel we have religious teaching largely different from that of Jesus. And yet how superior that teaching is to what it might have been had the same men written a century earlier: how utterly different and how incredibly superior. The thoughts and the feelings which the Founder of Christianity had brought into the world went on developing at the new level. The life which began with the Christian era went on uninterrupted, and has gone on to this day in all Christian countries.

We are told that "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples." As the reception of Jews and Pagans into the Christian fold was the work of the first disciples, so it fell to those disciples to Christianise the religious feelings and experiences of the Jewish and the Pagan world. With systems of doctrine the Master did not concern himself. He was contented with reflecting on to earth the light of heaven. But doctrine became the very near concern of the Christian Church. And in the formulation of it the great thinkers of early Christianity necessarily and naturally started from the point which the world had reached when it was overwhelmed by the flood of rising Christianity.

In the highest sense of the word the originality of Christianity is so great that it can scarcely be exaggerated. Whatever it adopted it transformed, as the growing plant transforms the nutriment which it gathers from the soil. But it is not doing true service either to history or to Christianity to represent the religion of Christ as coming down complete and formed from heaven, and having no antecedents on earth. In truth few either of the practices or the teachings of the early Church were altogether peculiar to it. As the life of the greatest of men may be seen on reasonable consideration to be after all a continuation under new conditions of the life

of his ancestors, so it is even with the greatest of religions. Doctrine and practice, art and organisation, all take their rise out of materials and conditions actually existing.

It is, of course, the acceptance of evolutionary views in science and history which has made us in the present day more fully alive to such truths as these. If for a moment it pains us to find that the religion which is so close to our hearts may be regarded as a link in the chain of history, as a derived species and not wholly a special creation, we must learn to set aside the feeling. We must learn in this as in other fields to distinguish between the question of origin and the question of divine suitability to life. Each of us, and all those whom we most admire, have risen, biologically speaking, out of embryos. Yet we have will and affection and spiritual consciousness. So in biological fashion we can trace the rise of Christianity, without for a moment doubting its divinity, or its claim on our hearts and lives.

The reason why the religion of Christ seems to spring out of the blank lies in the imperfect character of our historical education. To educated people in general the Jewish writings of the Kingdoms and the Captivity, and even of the Maccabæan revolt, are familiar. But the works of the Alexandrian and Palestinian writers of the age preceding Philo are quite unfamiliar. The state of earlier Israel and Judah, as reflected in the historical books of the Old Testament, is known. But the state of Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era, apart from the New Testament history itself, is almost unknown.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, the Hellas of Pericles and Demosthenes is studied by most of those who pretend to education; but the Greater Greece of the age which followed Alexander the Great is an almost unstudied phenomenon. The writers of the Hellenistic age were incomparably inferior in calibre to Thucydides and Sophocles and Plato, and their works have for the most part perished, so that we realise but very faintly how different Greece and Asia were at the Christian era from what they were in the great age of Hellas. Yet it is quite clear that unless we can realise not only with the intellect but even

<sup>1</sup> Admirable works on this subject are Schürer's *Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, and Hausrath's *New Testament Times*, both now translated.

in some degree with the imagination what the contemporaries of Jesus in Judæa and of Paul in Asia Minor were like, we shall always totally misjudge the facts of the Christian origins.

No doubt the writings of the New Testament themselves ought in this matter to be of the greatest value. They are contemporary or nearly contemporary documents full of vivid pictures of life and manners. But they have been so long used by preachers as an authority for doctrine, and twisted so completely to ethical ends, that men read them with a veil over their minds, and project all that they depict into a non-natural sphere.<sup>1</sup>

The actual discourses and parables of Jesus belong to the general class of Jewish Rabbinical lore. It is true that they seem to belong not to one country or time, but to all. But the ideas they embody are comparatively little mixed with Greek elements. As regards the calling of the nation, the nature of demoniacal possession, and other matters, Jesus seems fully to have shared the views of the Jews who surrounded him. Beneath the superficial crust of these opinions he penetrated, as no one else has ever penetrated, to the facts of the spiritual life.

If, however, we consider the surroundings, even of the earliest Christianity, we shall find that they were by no means exclusively Jewish. The kings of the Herodian dynasty were much like ordinary Hellenistic princes, and introduced many foreign ways. Tiberias, built by Antipas on the shores of the Galilean lake, was in appearance and ways a Græco-Roman city. The Greek language was spoken by all educated people. The coinage which passed from hand to hand was Roman and Greek. Many strict Jews, including even an uncle of Jesus, Cleopas, had Greek names. And to pass from the external to the internal, the Jewish writings of the beginning of the Christian era show an immense amount of Greek influence. Philo in particular is as deeply indebted to Plato as to the Pentateuch. He is half a Greek philosopher; and none of the fixed ideas of the Jewish race presents itself to his mind un-

<sup>1</sup> A good corrective to this state of mind will be found in some of the works of Prof. W. M. Ramsay.

modified by Greek ways of thought. Nor was the influence of Greek philosophy confined to the Jews of the great cities of Asia and Africa, in which there dwelt flourishing Jewish communities. Even the Jewish Rabbis of Judæa were by no means impervious to the teachings of Hellas. Gamaliel, the teacher of St. Paul, was one of those who approved the reading of Greek philosophy. Antigonus of Socho incurred from some of his contemporaries the accusation of heresy because he taught that man should not serve God for reward : a notion which he seems to have borrowed from the Greek schools. Josephus even speaks of the Pharisees as Stoics ; and though no doubt this expression is incorrect, it would be bold to say that Stoicism had no influence on the Pharisees. The Sanhedrim, the focus of Jewish energy and religion, took its name from the Greek word *συνέδριον*.<sup>1</sup>

Many such indications as these show that even the Jerusalem of the first century, and the strict sect of the Pharisees, were not by any means uninfluenced by Greek ways of thought. It is probable that we are in this matter misled by the prejudices of more modern Jews. After the age of Jesus, partly in consequence of the mad attempt of the Emperor Caius to introduce his own worship at Jerusalem, and still more after the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, there was among the Pharisees a fierce reaction against all western ways. Their fanaticism grew narrower and more bitter. In the days of Augustus and Tiberius a far more tolerant spirit had prevailed. The Herodians and the Sadducees were by no means impervious to the influences of Hellenism ; and even the Pharisees did not cherish that bitter hatred for all that was Greek or Roman which we find among them after Christianity had absorbed that part of the nation which was capable of wider views and profounder charity. It is certain that even the Synoptic discourses do not spring up in a purely Jewish soil. But the Johannine discourses are thoroughly permeated by the spirit of Greek or Judæo-Greek thought.

When we pass from the words uttered by the Founder of Christianity to those of his immediate followers, we find the

<sup>1</sup> A masterly summary of this matter may be found in Schürer's work, already cited.



influence of Hellas far more clear and strong. The shoot of the Christian faith had scarcely risen above the ground before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 forcibly removed it to the richer soil of Hellenism, where soon, from a mere seedling, it became a mighty tree, overshadowing the earth.

In an admirable work<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hatch has shown to what large extent the outward organisation of the early Church was founded upon the existing constitution of civil and religious bodies in later Greece and Asia Minor. In another work<sup>2</sup> the same writer has entered in a tentative way on a larger field, the debt of Christian doctrine to Hellenism. With enormous power of assimilation and renovation, the Christian Church conquered and absorbed all that in the surrounding world of Hellenism could be put to a Christian use, and made the vehicle of a Christian tendency. Organisation, festivals, art, customs, doctrine: all were accepted and all were Christianised. As Justin Martyr has observed in his noble Apology for Christianity, all that was good in the deeds of Heathendom belonged of right to Christianity.

The victorious course of Christianity brought it at once into contact with the ideas and the institutions of the Greek world. Even St. Paul, though a Pharisee, was brought up at Tarsus, a flourishing city, where his restless and receptive nature could not fail to acquire the intellectual customs then current in the whole civilised world. The Stoics had a school at Tarsus, and certainly influenced the thought of the Apostle. But as to the influence on early Christian doctrine of Greek philosophy we shall have more to say presently. At present I wish to dwell briefly on influences more strictly religious in character, which affected less the leaders who formed the creeds of the Church than the multitudes who thronged into it.

The old civic and national religion of Greece had been since the time of Alexander in a decaying state. By the force of conservatism and by the splendour of its ceremonial, it still held its own in the cities of old Greece, and it even made a

<sup>1</sup> "The Organisation of the Early Christian Churches;" *Bampton Lectures*, 1880. See above, Chap. XXIII.

<sup>2</sup> "The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church;" *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888.

lodgment in the new Hellenistic cities of Asia. But it had no expansive force, and small power of resistance when seriously attacked. It was not purely Hellenic religion which anywhere opposed with success the growing power of Christianity. And it was not purely Hellenic religion which anywhere held the masses of the people, or satisfied the religious needs of those who had a craving for spiritual things. The most powerful religious forces of Paganism were wielded by the priests and the societies who worshipped deities borrowed from the East, whose cultus, full of orgy and of enthusiasm, conquered by degrees all parts of the Hellenistic and Roman world. The really potent spiritual powers of Hellenism were those of Sarapis and Isis, Sabazius and Mithras. The mysteries of Eleusis were still powerful; but by their side stood other mysteries, Orphic, Isiac, and Mithraic, which, like them, professedly guaranteed to all votaries protection and purity in the present life, and a happy immortality beyond the grave.

To the orgiastic cults of later Greece<sup>1</sup> Christian writers have seldom been fair. There was in them a mixture of the sensual and spiritual which is repellent. They were deeply stained not merely with imposture and greed of money, but even with obscenity. It requires some courage to search in so distasteful a field for parallels to much that is deepest and best in Christianity. Yet such search is necessary, and in making it we must remember that we have no impartial account of the later Greek enthusiasms. The heathen writers who paint them in dark colours paint early Christianity with the same brush. Had Christianity not triumphed it would have appeared to the historian as a kindred religion to those of Isis and Mithras; and since it has triumphed its kinship with them has been unduly obscured.

In the centuries which immediately preceded and followed the Christian era, all the great religions of the world, which had shown signs of decay, renewed their force and sent forth new and vigorous shoots. In India, where Brahmanism had been stagnant, its new offshoot, the faith of Gautama, spread wide and became the dominant force. Buddhist missionaries travelled north, east, and west from the Cabul valley; and

<sup>1</sup> As to these see Foucart, *Associations religieuses chez les Grecs*.

some writers are even disposed to think that the sphere of their influence reached the Mediterranean. In Egypt the old faith of the country gave way in places to an eclectic religion more suited to the notions of the Greek conquerors. Sarapis, the ruler of the unseen world, took the place of Osiris; and Isis became a goddess of hidden rites and esoteric lore. In Asia Minor the religion of Cybele, which had long been powerful, grew more so, conquered the Galatian invaders, and spread its influence through Greece and Italy. The wailing for Adonis, the god who was yearly slain and yearly renewed his youth, was heard at Alexandria and Antioch. In Greece the Eleusinian cultus of Demeter and her daughter gradually changed its character, and became more and more of a national institution.

Two religions have special claims on our attention: those of Sabazius and of Mithras. At all times the religion of Dionysus had been of great importance at Athens, giving occasion to numerous festivals, in connexion with some of which we trace the beginnings of the dramatic art, and spreading a cheerful aspect over the daily life of the people. In the ordinary worship of Dionysus there was little of reflection or of mystery; it was in harmony with the joyous life of nature, and provocative of social intercourse and jollity. But there was another form of the worship of Dionysus, imported originally from Thrace or Phrygia, which had a less cheerful aspect, but more meaning for the history of religion. The chthonic Dionysus, Sabazius, was, like Sarapis, god of the world below, and of gloomy and forbidding aspect. The mysteries celebrated in his honour commemorated his birth, his death at the hands of the Titans, and his renewed life: a pledge that his votaries also should arise from the dead. The writings which went under the name of Orpheus, and dealt with the nature of the gods, the beginnings of the world, the destinies of the soul, were connected with this worship of Sabazius, Orpheus passing as the great priest of Dionysus and the organiser of his cult. It is very difficult to distinguish between the mysteries of Dionysus and those of Demeter and other Greek deities. Orphism in later Greece affected the rites at Eleusis. But we know from the writings of Clement

of Alexandria that a great space in the religion of later Greece was taken by Orphic mysteries, which had been at a far earlier time not without influence on the philosophy of Plato. The most interesting point about the Dionysiac religion was its possession of something like a scheme of doctrine embodied in a sacred literature, but small remnants of which have come down to us.

The religion of Mithras had its origin among the Zoroastrians of Persia. By some revolution of which we have no historic record, the sun-god Mithras acquired a pre-eminent place in the Persian pantheon, eclipsing the more majestic and inaccessible Ahuramazda. Strabo says of the Persians, "Mithras is their one deity," which proves how completely in the Augustan age this deity occupied the forefront of the religion of light. Mithras was the deity of the pirates of Cilicia in the first century B.C.; and when Pompeius overcame and dispersed the robber band the cult of their deity spread into the Roman Empire. At first it made way but slowly; none of the inscriptions belonging to it are of an earlier age than the first century A.D., and it did not attain its full dominion for two centuries more, when, as the religion specially favoured by the Roman army, it spread to all the frontiers of the Empire. We know more of the rites and organisation of the Mithraic religion than of its tenets. It became the most formidable rival of Christianity, and had Julian succeeded in checking the spread of the Christian faith, that of Mithras might have taken its place.

These various cults which were flourishing when Christianity arose had many points in common: in fact they constitute a genus by themselves. And they seem to have had little jealousy one of another, so that beliefs and votaries passed easily from one to the other. And although our knowledge of them is far from complete, some assertions in regard to them are justified. It is necessary to select some one designation for them; so I will here call them the *thiasi*. The *thiasus* was a society devoted to the worship of some special deity, and the most notable feature of these late cults was that they were the property of small organised societies.

It was of the essence of the *thiasi* that they appealed to

men separately and not in the mass. The deities of Greece and Rome had been deities of states, of cities, or of families; they had been political institutions or family patrons. But the thiasi appealed to the religious feelings and spiritual needs of individuals. And all were accepted by them; slaves and free, men and women, and even children, were to be found in their assemblies. Frequently women exercised in them a preponderant influence. Their headship belonged not to any hereditary officer, the representative of a family or a clan, but to whosoever could satisfy the demands of his fellows and could dominate them by superior intellect or piety. They were voluntary associations with institutions and an organisation developed out of their needs and desires.

Another general feature was their secrecy. Believing themselves to be under the protection of a presiding deity and in possession of valuable spiritual privileges, the members of the thiasi had no need or wish to appear publicly. Their recruits came to them privately one by one, and before being admitted to full privileges of membership had to pass through some probation and to submit to ordeals. To all the thiasi were attached mysteries: some solemn celebrations to which only fully qualified members were admitted, and which were highly valued as a pledge of certain privileges and hopes. Only by passing through the mysteries was the relation between votary and deity made definite and objective, and the protection of the god assured in life and in death.

The object of the mysteries seems to have been in all cases the establishment of a close relation between worshipper and deity. But the manner in which this relation was formed naturally varied. In some cases it was by a sacrifice of communion, such as we shall speak of in a future chapter. By eating and drinking the worshipper came near to his divinity. Thus at Eleusis the drink called the *κυκεών* was partaken of by all: in the Mithraic celebrations sacred food and drink was received by those present. In some cases the chief feature of the mysteries was a sacred representation, in which the sufferings and triumph of the deity were set forth. Eleusis celebrates, says Clement of Alexandria, by the light of torches, the abduction of Persephone, the wandering journeys



and the grief of Demeter. In imitation of Demeter the votaries fasted, sat on the "joyless rock," wandered on the shore; and like her they rejoiced when the Underworld gave up again her daughter, escaped from her grim lord Hades. In the Dionysiac mysteries the death and the resurrection of the young deity were celebrated by the worshippers; and similar representations took place in the mysteries of Isis and of Cybele. By these and other means it was supposed that it was made possible for the worshipper to enter into the life and passion of the deity, and for the deity to come near to the worshipper.

Sometimes this relationship to the deity became so close that the worshipper was, as it were, absorbed into the worshipped. The identification of the ministering priest with his deity continually meets us in ancient religious cult. In the thiasi, the official priest being less important, this close relation to the deity became possible to all worshippers. And there was another point in which the thiasi marked an advance upon the state-cults of Greece. The deity of the thiasus was regarded as to be identified with almost any divine being. *Æsculapius*, *Sarapis*, *Mithras*, were not strangers who stood outside the Pantheon demanding admittance, but they were *Zeus*, *Apollo*, *Helios*, any and every power of nature and the unseen world. The thiasi were henotheistic in regarding their own patron as supreme in all the provinces of the divine; and henotheism leads on very naturally to monotheism. Thus though gross superstition held the mass of the worshippers, yet the few could find in the ideas of the thiasi the means of rising to the higher spheres of personal spirituality.

Doctrine in any regular and elaborate form was certainly not taught in the mysteries, the object of which was rather to produce a certain frame of mind and a certain disposition of heart than to teach spiritual truths. But there can be no doubt that in a less formal way various religious beliefs were inculcated, especially the necessity of purity, first ritual and then moral, in all those who would come into the divine presence, and the existence of a future life in which punishment and reward would be meted out to men in accord with their past doings.

When the participants in any of the Pagan mysteries tried to express in a word the benefit they looked for from their initiation, they sometimes used the word *σωτηρία*, salvation. Not unfairly the thiasy might be termed the salvation armies of antiquity. "The surest and most important fact," writes Dr. Anrich,<sup>1</sup> "in regard to the mysteries is this, that the end and aim of their celebration was the attainment of *σωτηρία* guaranteed to the initiated. This consisted, in the first and most important place, in a blessed immortality hereafter; in the second place, in a new life on earth in the society and under the protection of the deity worshipped." "Les mystères de Mithra," writes M. Gasquet,<sup>2</sup> "comme en général tous les mystères de l'antiquité, avaient pour objet d'expliquer aux initiés le sens de la vie présente, de calmer les appréhensions de la mort, de purifier l'âme sur sa destinée d'outre-tombe, et de leur faire espérer la libération du cycle des existences expiatoires. Cette libération s'opère par l'entremise d'un dieu psychopompe et sauveur, qui lui-même a passé par l'épreuve, subi une passion et traversé l'éclipse d'une mort passagère pour revivre jeune et triomphant." Much of this is expressed in our revivre jeune et come down to us in Firmicus Maternus, and two verses which to one or other of the Pagan mysteries, "Be comforted, mystic; since your god is saved, you too shall be saved from all your pains." It is not strange that the writer who prescribes this distich should add "Habet ergo diabolus christi servos for us where of course by *diabolus* he means the spirit of Paganism";

The renewal of the life of individual or clan by a soricism. service, in which a fresh union between the deity and the individual or clan was brought about, was one of the most primitive and essential parts of early religion. We shall speak of it in more detail in the chapter on *Sacrifice and Christianity*. It was frequently spoken of in the Pagan mysteries as a new birth, especially in the Taurobolium, which properly belonged to the religion of Cybele, but which seems to have become a part of

<sup>1</sup> *Das antike Mysterienwesen in seinem Einfluss auf das Christentum*, 1894, p. 17. This is a very moderate and useful summary, though not specially striking or original.

<sup>2</sup> *Essai sur le culte et les mystères de Mithra*, 1899, p. 45.

the cult of Mithras also. The votary was in this ceremony sprinkled with the blood of a slain ox, and was thereby, as it is expressed in extant inscriptions, "renatus," or "renatus in aeternum." Of course salvation and the new birth did not attain in the Pagan mysteries more than a small part, an adumbration, of the meaning those phrases were to attain in developed Christianity. They only furnished the body wherein the soul was to dwell. They only provided organs which were destined for functions as yet undeveloped.

There is a loathsome side to the religion of the thiasi. Belonging in a marked degree to the less educated and refined classes of the people, they were in the way of pollution by materialism, imposture, and vulgarity. M. Foucart, who has a great dislike of the thiasi, writes,<sup>1</sup> "*Ils ne manquaient pas d'attribuer aux purifications et aux autres pratiques matérielles une valeur indépendante des dispositions morales; ils avaient des secrets pour forcer la volonté des dieux.*" The Roman satirists reckoned the thiasi among the causes which were producing the corruption of the Empire. But many of the most beneficial revolutions which have taken place in human affairs have had their origin in a foul soil. New ideas, when they dawn on the world, often appear in places which respectability sedulously avoids.

That Christianity should be influenced, not directly by the Pagan thiasi, but by the ideas which dominated them, will seem more natural if we remember that these ideas had at the beginning of the Christian era largely influenced a Jewish sect, the Essenes. It appears from the account which Josephus<sup>2</sup> gives of the Essenes, that in many respects these strange people were dominated by the same views which marked the Pagan Mysteries. Their views as to the future life were like those of the Orphists: they were dominated by the desire of purity, ceremonial and other; they practised baptism. And they seem to have come perilously near to Paganism in their adoration of the rising sun. The question has often been raised whether the teaching of Jesus contains Essene elements. This question is not easily answered: but it would seem to be

<sup>1</sup> *Assoc. relig. chez les Grecs*, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> *B. J.* ii. 8.

more likely that Essenism influenced the Church after the Crucifixion through the mental and moral habits which the Essenes had spread among the Jews of Palestine.

It is certain that early Christianity shows remarkable analogies both to the ideas and to the language of the Pagan thiasi. It is not to be supposed that the Christian leaders would deliberately borrow either rites or language from cults which they regarded as of diabolic origin. But the spirit of the age worked in the Church as in the thiasi, producing developments parallel, however widely different in value. And when the Christian Fathers came to speak and write of their own mysteries they were compelled to use the only language available, that of the thiasi. "Our survey shows," writes Anrich,<sup>1</sup> "how the most general and most important parts of the terminology of the mysteries passed into the language of the Church. We need not look for any intentional or calculated adoption; for at all times the Church had the utmost horror of heathen mysteries. Rather the fact that the ceremonies of the Church were regarded as mysteries, led, naturally, to an unintentional adoption of terms suitable to that way of regarding them which had been moulded by a practice of centuries, and had become a settled part of the Greek language."

And what is true of language is true also of ideas and of rites. "The great benefits which men hoped to secure by initiation in the mysteries were: first, purification and cleanness, then a blessed immortality hereafter. In the same way the benefits of the Christian mysteries may be summed up in the words purification and immortality."<sup>2</sup> The ceremonies of the early Church, also, were not invented, but naturally and inevitably taken from existing custom, just as much as the external form of the Christian societies.

When we have realised these facts we cease to be astonished that superficial Pagan observers found a strong likeness between the thiasi and the Christian societies. Apart from intentional copying, institutions adapted to the same human needs, and arising amid the same surroundings, must have

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> καθαρσις and ἀθανασία. Anrich, p. 179.

borne a superficial likeness to one another. In particular, the Mithraic cult, which grew up beside Christianity in the provinces of the Roman Empire, resembled it in many externals. M. Cumont, the most recent and most learned writer on Mithras, writes as follows:<sup>1</sup> "Like the Christians, the followers of Mithras lived in closely united societies, calling one another father and brother; like the Christians, they practised baptism, communion, and confirmation, taught an authoritative morality, preached continence, chastity, self-denial, and self-control; like the Christians, they spoke of a deluge, and believed in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead; in a heaven for the blessed and a hell which was the abode of evil spirits." The only part of the Mithraic cult which Christianity seems to have intentionally borrowed is Christmas day, the winter solstice, or festival of the birth of the new sun. But probably the two religions, growing side by side, influenced one another in an unconscious way in many matters.

We are, however, in danger of passing outside the narrow limits prescribed to this work. We must return from these more general views to consider more definitely whether the working of the ideas preserved and embodied in the Pagan mysteries can be traced in the Christianity of the Apostolic Age, as well as in the later growth of the Church. Most writers would allow that in the third and fourth centuries the development of Christianity was in some degree influenced by the religion of the thiasi. But can this be proved for the first century of Christian history? And we must at once allow that Pagan religious ideas influenced the Gnostics more rapidly and more deeply than they did the more orthodox Christians. The Gnostics, as Prof. Harnack has well shown, represent a premature Hellenisation of Christianity; they accepted too early, and therefore too crudely, ideas destined in time to have great influence in the Church. But apart from the Gnostic sects, the main ideas of the thiasi were certainly built into the very foundations of the Church.

Like the thiasi the Christian missionaries called men to their fold not by cities nor by families, but as individuals, "the

<sup>1</sup> Roscher's *Lexikon*, ii. p. 3066.



one taken and the other left." Like the thiasi they called on their disciples to come out from among their fellows, to practise a more austere morality, to pursue new paths of conduct. Like the thiasi, the Christian society placed a new spiritual bond between disciple and disciple as a more sacred tie than those of mere secular society. Like the thiasi, early Christianity levelled ranks and sexes. In the thiasi many of the most influential members were slaves and women. We think naturally of the names of Onesimus, Aquila, Priscilla, Lydia, Damaris, and others, who gave great help to the Christian missionaries. And not only in social working, but in doctrine also we find in the course of the first century a close parallelism between the thiasi and the churches.

The great difference between the teaching of the Synoptic Jesus on the one hand, and the teaching of Paul, of the Fourth Evangelist, and of the author of *Hebrews* on the other, is just that the latter is permeated, as the former is not, by the ideas of spiritual communion, of salvation, of justification, and mediation: ideas which had found an utterance, however imperfect, in the teaching of the thiasi. The Fourth Gospel dwells on the need of the second birth, on the way in which the disciple abides in his Master, on the divine light which shines amid earthly darkness. Paul speaks of Christ as the head of the Church, of justification by faith, of bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, of the flesh that wars against the spirit. The author of *Hebrews* calls Christ the Mediator and Great High Priest, the Saviour of men, and their representative before God. Christians are, like the Pagan Mystæ, called upon to be *ὅσιοι* and *ἄγιοι*. And in the second Corinthian Epistle Paul speaks of the Eucharist in a manner which shows that already in the churches which he had founded it had taken the mystic and sacramental position which it has never since lost.

It would be misleading to speak of this change, the general nature of which is indisputable, as due to the direct influence of the Pagan thiasi. My contention is quite different. I maintain that the language of the Pauline and Johannine writings shows the translation of Christianity on to a new level by the reception and the baptism into Christ of a set of ideas which at the time, coming from a divine source, were

making their way into the various religions of the human race. These ideas, when passing into such cults as those of Sabazius and Mithras, transferred them to a higher spiritual sphere, raised their tone and fitted them to a better life. These ideas, passing into early Christianity, could not indeed raise its tone, but more fully adapted it for human reception, prevented it from remaining too pure and spiritual for ordinary men to live by, made it a continuation of the spiritual life of mankind rather than a sudden break in that life. Matthew Arnold may call the growth of doctrine in the Church "Aberglaube reinvading." I should prefer to liken the spiritual life of mankind in the first century to that of a man to whom has been revealed a heavenly vision, but who finds, on coming to himself, that he must still pursue the path of his former life, but with every step made clearer and brighter by the memory of what has been revealed to him.

Of course the contrast between Christianity and the thiasí becomes only the more clear the longer one dwells on their resemblances. If Osiris and Dionysus had died and risen again, the story of their resurrection was embodied in tales handed down from a barbarous age, uncouth and hideous, and little fitted to embody higher spiritual truth. If Mithras, the sun-god, was the image of the Creator, the Saviour and Mediator, Mithraism had no divine life lived on earth to set as a pattern before the eyes of the Mystæ. The sun is the noblest feature in nature, and in many religions the solar cult has been the vehicle of a higher morality than that current. But when the Jesus Christ of the Gospels and Epistles was set before men, it seems to modern eyes very strange that any should have preferred to seek salvation by humanising the powers of nature, rather than by accepting a perfect type of humanity which stood ready. The explanation of the strange fact is best found in a study of the writings of the Emperor Julian.<sup>1</sup>

The religion of the Pagan masses lived on, though in greatly improved form, into Christianity. And the religion of the Greek philosophers lived on, as we shall see in the next chapter. What did not live on into Christianity, unhappily,

<sup>1</sup> See *Julian the Philosopher*, by Alice Gardner, pp. 184, etc.

was the best elements of the Hellenic religion, the nobler doctrines of cults like those of Apollo and Athena. When Christianity arose they had already suffered eclipse. Thus the divine nobleness of moderation and order, the charm of the *mens sana in corpore sano*, the beauty of a perfectly proportioned character, of manliness and a noble ambition, perfect freedom in thought and aspiration, in fact the whole range of higher Hellenic religious ideas, were omitted in the web of Christianity. That such ideas were not wholly lost sight of in the Middle Ages was certainly not due to those who spoke authoritatively for Christianity. Since the Renaissance we have been slowly recovering the range of higher Hellenic ideas from poem and drama, from orator and historian, from temple and sculpture. These ideas are still mainly the appanage of the more highly educated classes. They scarcely reach the masses. And even to the educated they do not seem to have the same power of appeal which is exercised by such ideas as were woven into the web of early Christianity. Yet there is not in the nature of things any reason why the best Hellenic ideas should not be baptized into Christ. They are, in fact, far more closely akin to the teaching of Jesus, as given in the Synoptic Gospels, than many ideas which have been incorporated into Christianity. It is, however, quite impossible to speak further on this subject in the present work: I can but mention it in passing.

I have dwelt with emphasis on the Pagan parallels to Christian doctrine, because I believe their importance to have been hitherto generally underestimated. It remains to speak of those roots of Christian doctrine which were nourished by Jewish soil; but on this subject I need not dwell at great length, since it is adequately treated in many works.

That which makes a strong line of distinction between other Oriental religious growths and the Christian Church, besides the special inspiration due to the Founder, is this, that Christianity lived at a far higher moral level. The religions of Isis and of Mithras belong to the same genus as Christianity, but to very inferior species. And Christianity owes much of its marked superiority to the fact that it inherited the spiritual traditions of the Jewish race, which had, in antiquity, an un-

equalled genius for religion. On two lines we can trace back Christian excellence to a Jewish source.

Christianity inherited from Judaism a boon of inestimable value in the writings of the Old Testament. Harnack writes: "Whatever sources of comfort and strength Christianity, even in its New Testament, has possessed, or does possess up to the present, are, for the most part, taken from the Old Testament, viewed from a Christian standpoint, in virtue of the impression of the person of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> Just as the ancient doctrines of salvation and mediation had to be baptized into Christ, so had the writings of the Jewish Bible. But baptism does not put weak and strong, manly and effeminate, on one level. So the intrinsic excellence of the Old Testament revelation remained, under Christianity, as a continued source of power. Faith in God as the Creator and Ruler of the world, and as lord of the human soul, a strong sense of sin and of the possibility of forgiveness, a delight in the divine decrees, the blessedness of union between the divine will and that of man: these and other such religious ideas are nowhere expressed with so much force and beauty as in some of the writings of the Jewish Scriptures. And these Scriptures the Christians made thoroughly their own, only by degrees placing on a level with them even the records of the life of the Master and the Epistles of his Apostles.

It has been observed by theologians that it was this adherence of the Church to the Jewish Scriptures which saved it from such extravagances as marked the systems of the Gnostics, and the antinomianism which naturally arose from the exaggeration of Pauline tendencies. They furnished the ship of Christianity with ballast; they provided a standard of appeal by which new enthusiasms and developing tendencies might be tried and corrected. Marcion, for example, a thoroughly spiritual man and a great religious leader, through his rejection of the Old Testament was led into such aberrations as the belief in two deities, whereof one was the Creator of the world and the Deity of the Jews; the other was the good God of love revealed to the world by Jesus Christ, who saved men from the stern rule of the Creator, and gave them

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. p. 42. Trans. i. 42.

new and spiritual life. Against such views as these the best preservative for Christianity existed in the works of the Prophets and the Psalmists.

Perhaps, however, it is better to speak of the Old Testament as a test and regulator of doctrine than as a source of it. For very little doctrine can be extracted from it, unless it is read in quite a fanciful way, with a pre-arranged system to which it must conform. We have seen how the early disciples built out of misinterpreted Scripture a great part of the life of the Founder. And out of the same materials they enriched the doctrinal constructions of the age, though the main lines of those constructions were not properly Jewish.

The construction of doctrine was enormously facilitated, perhaps in a great degree controlled, by the tendencies which had, during the centuries preceding the Christian era, driven the Jews from their native land into the great cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, and there formed them into strongly marked communities. It has been well pointed out by recent historians that the early Christian communities outside Palestine were almost entirely made up, in the first century, of these Hellenistic Jews, and the Gentile proselytes whom they had attracted, and to whom Christianity came in the first instance as a reformed Judaism. Harnack observes<sup>1</sup> that, unless all Christian origins are to be resolved into a gray mist, we must learn to distinguish between the tendencies which originated in the Hellenistic communities of Jews, and those which came from the Greek Gentiles. This is, of course, true; yet our knowledge of the Jews of the Diaspora, their writings and their beliefs, is so limited, that we are often unable to say whether a Greek idea which affects early Christianity comes into it through a Jewish medium or direct. At all events, this is the case after the fall of Jerusalem. So that we are obliged, however unwillingly, often to abide in the gray mist. Harnack mentions three definite points wherein we may see the influence of the Diaspora on Christianity:<sup>2</sup> (1) Its geographical spread is determined by the existence or non-existence of Jewish colonies in the several districts. All the Pauline churches

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 53. Trans. i. 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 54. Trans. i. 55.



were founded in cities with a large Jewish population; (2) The treatment and interpretation of the Old Testament by Gentile Christian teachers closely resemble those current among the Jews of Alexandria; (3) There are early Christian writings which have an astonishing resemblance to the works of the Diaspora; in fact, in some cases we are unable to say whether treatises are of Jewish or Christian origin.

The Gospel, it appears, passed into the Greek and Roman world over the bridge offered by the Diaspora. "We may gather," writes Harnack,<sup>1</sup> "that there was a Judaism in the Diaspora, to the consciousness of which the cultus and ceremonial law were of comparatively subordinate importance, while the monotheistic worship of God, apart from images, the doctrine of virtue, and belief in a future reward beyond the grave, stood in the foreground as its really essential marks."

It was the cultivation of private and domestic virtues which kept alive the Jewish colonies in the cosmopolitan cities of the Levant, just as it preserved the Jews of Europe during the persecutions of the Middle Ages. By these virtues were laid the foundations of a healthy moral tone which Christianity inherited from Judaism, and apart from which even the sublime morality of the Sermon on the Mount might have failed to redeem the daily life of the Gentile converts from the indifference to moral law which always marked Græco-Roman society. And with an ardent monotheism and a pure moral code the Jews of the Diaspora brought into Christianity many doctrinal tendencies, which had naturally arisen from their contact with Hellenic thought.

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 103. Trans. i. 107.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHY

It is impossible fruitfully to consider the nature of Christian doctrine, until we have first analysed the intellectual conditions amid which it arose. If that doctrine is objectively true and imparted from above to men without any regard to their intellectual faculties and mental habits, well and good. But if, as every educated person now thinks, there is a considerable human element in all doctrine, and the light of the idea shines through an earthly setting, then it is of the utmost importance to study the human conditions which lay around the cradle of the faith. Our knowledge of human nature, of literature, and of history, should enable us, at least in some degree, to determine beforehand the form which early Christian doctrine was sure to take. Just as a skilled philologist could tell us what forms primitive Teutonic words take in this or that modern Teutonic language, so a skilled historian should be able to tell us what tendencies would control the shaping of doctrine in the early Church.

The pure light of heavenly inspiration does not fall upon blank minds, but upon faculties highly coloured by nature and training. We readily see that one side of Christianity makes more impression on the authors of the *Logia*, another on the Fourth Evangelist, another on Paul, another on Justin. But we less readily perceive what is quite as certain and as important, that there were also tendencies and prejudices which belonged not to individuals, but to the times. Those who wrote in the first and second centuries must needs write

in the style of the times, and with the literary habits of the times. Those who thought then must think on the lines of educated intellectual habit. If we read the early Christian writers, and take their words undiscounted, as we should take the word of a neighbour or friend, we shall be very far from understanding them. All this is perfectly obvious and commonplace, yet few theologians or historians have been able to keep it always before them in their writings.

In the present work we deal only with the early stages of the development of doctrine. It originated in Asia Minor principally, and was concerned with the person of the Founder of Christianity. Somewhat later, speculative Christology was supplemented or superseded by Soteriology, the doctrine of man's salvation, which largely arose in Rome and the West. The dominant influence in the minds of the earliest educated Christians was certainly that of Greek philosophy. With the rise of the Roman primacy, the language and the ideas of Roman law have increased influence on doctrine.

At the beginning of the Christian era the mind of every educated man was formed on Greek literature, rhetoric, and philosophy. This composed then the whole mental atmosphere, just as later the revived Aristotelian philosophy formed the mental atmosphere of the schoolmen. Whoever thought at all, had to think on this plane. Perhaps the easiest way to bring this home to one's self is by considering the writings of Cicero and Aurelius. Cicero was a Roman, not a Greek; a statesman, not a philosopher; yet Greek philosophy is in the very air he breathes. The great Emperor Marcus Aurelius was a Roman of the haughtiest type; yet he, too, must philosophise in the phrases of the Greek schools, and even write in the Greek language. Greek philosophy was in those days all, and more than all, that science and ethics are now; and Greek rhetoric was the great means of education to all men of intellectual ambition.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the earliest of the Christian writings some influence of philosophy may be traced. The remarkable parallel which exists between some of the earliest Christian documents and the writings of the Roman Stoics, especially

<sup>1</sup> Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, Lect. ii.

Seneca, has been traced by the masterly hand of Dr. Lightfoot. He shows<sup>1</sup> that between the Sermon on the Mount and some of the writings of Seneca there may be traced a remarkable series of coincidences in thought and expression. "Nor are these coincidences of thought and imagery confined to the Sermon on the Mount. If our Lord compares the hypocritical Pharisees to whited walls, and contrasts the scrupulously clean outside of the cup and platter with the inward corruption, Seneca also adopts the same images: 'Within is no good: if thou shouldest see them, not where they are exposed to view, but where they are concealed, they are miserable, filthy, vile, adorned without like their own walls. . . . Then it appears how much real foulness beneath the surface this borrowed glitter has concealed.' If our Lord declares<sup>2</sup> that the branches must perish unless they abide in the vine, the language of Seneca presents an eminently instructive parallel: 'As the leaves cannot flourish by themselves, but want a branch wherein they may grow and whence they may draw sap, so those precepts wither if they are alone: they need to be grafted in a sect.' Again, the parables of the sower, of the mustard-seed, of the debtor forgiven, of the talents placed out at usury, of the rich fool, have all their echoes in the writings of the Roman Stoic."

Dr. Lightfoot proceeds to point out further resemblances between the writings of Seneca and the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and especially Paul. "The first impression<sup>3</sup> made by this series of parallels is striking. They seem to show a general coincidence in the fundamental principles of theology and the leading maxims in ethics: they exhibit, moreover, special resemblances in imagery and expression, which, it would seem, cannot be explained as the result of accident, but must point to some historical connection." Even after allowing for the Oriental origin of Stoicism, and other circumstances, Dr. Lightfoot is disposed to attribute some value to the stories which tell of actual intercourse between Seneca and Paul, though he does not regard the connection of the two

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> I should regard this comparison as due to the Fourth Evangelist rather than to Jesus. See p. 409.

<sup>3</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 273.

as proven. In my opinion the coincidences are only a very remarkable instance of the way in which contemporary authors, working on similar lines, fall into the same forms of thought and expression. Seneca is not a strikingly original writer, but to a large extent dependent on his predecessors. He borrows from the general stock of philosophic views and ethical ideas. And it can scarcely be doubted that the early Christian writers borrowed from the same stock.

Though we cannot prove a definite connection between Paul and Seneca, we can with assurance trace in Paul's language the influence of the Stoic philosophy which was dominant at Tarsus. As Dr. Lightfoot observes,<sup>1</sup> "St. Paul found in the ethical language of the Stoics expressions more fit than he could find elsewhere to describe in certain aspects the duties and the privileges, the struggles and triumphs, of the Christian life." "The Stoic expressions, describing the independence of the individual spirit, the subjugation of the unruly passions, the universal empire of a triumphant self-control, the cosmopolitan relations of the wise man, were quickened into new life, when an unfailing source of strength and a boundless hope of victory had been revealed in the Gospel, when all men were proclaimed to be brothers, and each and every man united with God in Christ." "It is difficult to estimate, and perhaps not very easy to overrate, the extent to which Stoic philosophy had leavened the moral vocabulary of the civilised world at the time of the Christian era. To take a single instance: the most important of moral terms, the crowning triumph of ethical nomenclature, *συνείδησις*, *conscientia*, the internal, absolute, supreme judge of individual action, if not struck in the mint of the Stoics, at all events became current coin through their influence." All this is the more intelligible when we remember that Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, was of Semitic race, and that the doctrine of Stoicism from the first combines Oriental with Greek ethical ideas. Zeno was in a sense a forerunner of Paul; and the Stoic teachings of providence, of the goodness of the ideal wise man, of the depravity of ordinary human beings, all have their counterpart in early Christian writings.

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 287.



Thus the influence of Greek philosophy on the earliest Christian writings affects their ethical tone and the language which they employ. When we consider the rise of doctrine, which for the most part belongs to a somewhat later time, we find the influence of philosophy still more potent.

In the early Imperial age, philosophy had naturally undergone great changes since the days of Plato and Aristotle. Those great thinkers had indeed fixed, so far as the ancient world was concerned, the methods and the language of philosophy; but its tone, its objects, and its tendencies had greatly changed. The particular lines to be traced in Plato, which later thought especially pursued, were, first the ethics of the individual, and second the glimpses of a higher ideal world which often recur in the Platonic dialogues.

It is known to all students how the predominantly ethical schools of the Stoics and the Epicureans tended in the later Greek and the Roman worlds to occupy the foreground, and to throw into the background schools of philosophy or a more theoretic cast. The philosophy of the Roman age is also deeply penetrated by precisely those ideas which we have found to be the life of the thiasi. Its enquiries are largely directed towards such questions as fellowship with the divine, the future life, emancipation from the thralldom of the flesh, purification of the heart. Writers like Iamblichus and Porphyry speak of philosophy, just as the thiasi regarded their mysteries, as a means of salvation, of escaping from the pollution of the body, and the attainment of a saving knowledge. Plato had sometimes spoken of philosophy as if it were an initiation: in Philo and later writers this manner of speaking is carried further and taken more literally. To Philo higher knowledge is a heavenly mystery; the philosopher is the hierophant; and it is only to be attained by the mystæ through his aid. In the later Alexandrian philosophy there was even a tendency to deny that a vision of the divine could ever be gained by mere thought: to assert that an extatic vision alone could bring man into the presence of God.

Thus in many ways the philosophy of later Greece, and especially of Alexandria, might be regarded as a cousin on the one side of the religion of the thiasi, on the other of

Christianity. Some of the Fathers of the Church had been philosophers, and came into the community with formed mental habits which they were not likely greatly to change. They found in the religion of Christ a solution of the questions which had been busying their minds. Moral needs, which they had in vain tried to satisfy by philosophic study and by practice of the Mysteries, found rest in the Church.

And in thus attracting to herself the best heads and the most enthusiastic hearts of the Pagan world, the Church undoubtedly enriched her blood. But few gains in the world are quite free from loss. And it must be allowed that in thus admitting the methods and the language of philosophy into her pale, the Church did not wholly profit. Greek philosophy has never lost, probably never will lose, its hold on educated men. What Homer is to the poet, and the Psalms to the religious man, that Plato and Aristotle are to men of systematic thought. They are to all time the classical writers in this sphere. We find a leader of men like the late Dr. Jowett spending great part of forty years of his life on Plato. The study of early Greek philosophy is not merely a mental training, but a feeding of the soul, an enrichment of life, almost a religion. Yet those who are most devoted to Greek philosophy would many of them allow that its interest for us is literary and historical rather than scientific. Aristotle indeed did later, in the Middle Ages, establish a great intellectual empire. But it was not Aristotle but Plato who was the great master of philosophy in late Greek times. Aristotle was indeed then very imperfectly known. And Plato, though the source of philosophy, is anything but rigid or methodical. It is not so much his reasonings which interest us as his literary charm, the Socratic irony, the glimpses of Athenian surroundings, the wise remarks on life, the suggestive myths. The Platonic philosophy, with all its charm, was very ill adapted for putting religious truth into scientific shape, or into a scheme likely to survive in a changed intellectual atmosphere.

And as school succeeded school, greater and greater domination was exercised by the literary and rhetorical element.<sup>1</sup> We have already seen what an incubus the rhetorical tendency of

<sup>1</sup> Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, Lect. iv.

the Greek mind was to the Greek historians. It was at least as fatal to Greek philosophy. It made it unreal: a mesh of skilfully chosen words rather than an attempt to understand realities. Just as a growth of ivy will kill a grove of forest trees, so the parasitic growth of rhetoric overpowered Greek poetry, Greek art, every growth of the Hellenic spirit. Rhetoric strangled Greek philosophy, and tried to strangle Christian doctrine. Christianity, says Mr. Hatch, "came into the educated world in the simple dress of a Prophet of Righteousness. It won that world by the stern reality of its life, by the subtle bonds of its brotherhood, by its divine message of consolation and of hope. Around it thronged the race of eloquent talkers, who persuaded it to change its dress and to assimilate its language to their own. It seemed thereby to win a speedier and completer victory. But it purchased conquest at the price of reality." However regrettable this corruption may seem to us, it was doubtless necessary at the time to fit Christianity to its mundane environment. But necessary or not, the change was one which injuriously affects Christianity even in our days.

Greek philosophy was not fairly absorbed into Christianity until the time of Clement of Alexandria, towards the end of the second century. Clement recognises fully the value of philosophy as a preparation for Christianity; he speaks of it as fulfilling the same function for the Greeks which the Law fulfilled for the Jews, the function of the pedagogue to bring them to the school. But before the time of Clement, from the very origin of Christian doctrine, the working of Platonic philosophy and Greek rhetoric had conditioned its growth.

I must, in few words, point out in what respects the intellectual condition of the Hellenistic world injuriously affected the formation of doctrine. I have already tried to show that it made objective history almost impossible. It also sowed the seeds of weakness in doctrine in consequence of its imperfect mastery of the facts of the outer world, and the principles of human nature.

It was an event of vast importance in the history of the human mind when Socrates and Plato turned from the physical speculations of the Ionian school of philosophy to

psychology and ethics. Despairing of gaining any satisfactory knowledge of the fleeting phenomena of the physical world, they turned their observation inwards, towards the faculties of man, his conscience and the paths of conduct. The bent thus given to Greek thought persisted to the end. Aristotle, it is true, was interested as well in the phenomena of the world as in those of human nature. And in the Hellenistic age of Greece we find, side by side with the philosophic schools of the Stoics, the Epicureans, and Academics, many men of science, attached in some cases to the museum of Alexandria. And in exact science, especially in mathematics, the Greeks made great progress. Yet the main tendency of Greek thought was never changed. It always paid most attention to man, to metaphysics, and to conduct, and placed on a lower level the knowledge derived from observation and experiment in the visible world. Thus though the progress of the later Greeks in orderly knowledge of the world was great, yet the point of view of their scientists would necessarily seem, to a modern mind, very primitive. And those who had the moulding of Christian doctrine were not trained in the medical or scientific schools, but were mere laymen as regards scientific knowledge. Hence we need not be surprised that the early chapters of Genesis, which have been such a stumbling-block to the intelligent artizan of our time, did not disturb the faith of the early Fathers. And the popular notions as to earth, air, and sky were assumed in some of the early Christian doctrines, such as that of the descent of the Founder into Hades, "in the lowest parts of the earth," and his physical resurrection and ascension in a human body to heaven. In such cases orthodox theologians see the assertion of stupendous miracles, whereas the originators of the doctrines were probably merely intent on stating truths in the ordinary terms dictated by their views of the universe. If Christ visited the dead, of course he would "descend into the lower parts of the earth." If he sat down at the right hand of God, it would naturally be in the body, without which Jews could not conceive personal existence or continued consciousness as possible. We have recourse to miracle, to allegory, to a hundred theories to explain what to

them needed no explanation, and stood firm by its inherent reasonableness.

But of far more importance in the rise of doctrine than any false views of the world, were the current views in psychology and metaphysics. Greek philosophy somewhat despised the things of sense, and was far more deeply concerned with things beyond sense, but not as was supposed beyond reason. The doctrine of the Trinity or of the person of Christ served just as well for speculative metaphysical constructions and the practice of intellectual sword-play as the theory of the *summum bonum* or of the origin of the world. It is, however, certain that as the men of science of the Alexandrian Museum were undeveloped in comparison with Darwin and Haeckel, so were the philosophers of the later schools of Greece primitive when compared with Kant and modern psychologists. We have not, it may be, solved the problems which Chrysippus and Carneades loved to discuss; but we have learned at least approximately the nature of the limits of human thought. The day of *a priori* metaphysics is over. We now have learned that it is not possible by an analysis of thought and abstract ideas to reach a final and perfect view of the realities of the universe. All metaphysic now must be based on a preliminary psychology.

Ancient psychology, which lay at the roots of Greek philosophy, was thoroughly vitiated by two false views which ran like rotten threads through the whole of its structure, rendering it incapable of resisting the strain of developed criticism.

The first of these is a want of clear discrimination between what man can know and what he cannot know. Scepticism was abundantly represented in the philosophic schools from Pyrrho and Carneades to Sextus Empiricus. But it is obvious that scepticism in an age when science is unfledged is a perfectly different thing from scepticism as regards what lies outside the bounds of science. To the Greek sceptics everything became a matter of doubt. With us the question is in what sense we can be said to know that which is to us matter of knowledge, and what is our reasonable attitude towards that which can never be in the strict



sense matter of knowledge. Thus there is a gulf between ancient and modern criticism. Ancient thinkers had to choose between complete scepticism and unsound construction. The doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, which has conquered the intellectual world, has produced a change in our way of regarding knowledge parallel to the change which took place in the theory of astronomy when a heliocentric conception of our system of worlds took the place of the older geocentric conception. The importance of the subjective element in all thought was not fully realised in an age when men had not attained to full self-consciousness. And whatever evils may attend a growing appreciation by man of his own needs and faculties, of the laws of human nature, yet that appreciation, when once attained, must be the dominant factor in all future philosophising as to the nature of consciousness, of the world, and of God. The critical philosophy has made all theorising on these subjects which was developed in ancient days seem rather suggestive than conclusive.

Equal weakness is displayed by Greek philosophy when it treats of the will. The Platonic paradox holds that it is better to do evil knowingly than unknowingly, because we have in the first case only ill-doing, but in the second case ill-doing and ignorance as well. And this paradox does not in any way stand by itself; it is merely a specimen of the results of inadequate views as to the nature of the will, and its relation to good and evil. Aristotle, with his doctrine of virtue as a habit, marks a great advance on Plato in this matter. The Stoics made a still further advance. But perhaps the best teaching in Greek schools, as regards the will, may be found in Neo-Platonic writings. "The emphasis," writes Harnack,<sup>1</sup> "which Iamblichus lays on the idea that evil has its seat in the will, is an important fact; and in general the significance which he assigns to the will is perhaps the most important advance in psychology, and one which could not fail to have great influence on dogmatics also." The Neo-Platonic psychology came in time to influence the doctrinal constructions of Augustine, but not in time to influence the earlier Christologic doctrine, which does not escape the

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. p. 778. Trans. i. 355.

confusion between knowledge and virtue, which may be said to be ingrained in Greek speculation. In practice the Christian Church never swerved from upholding the essentially Jewish views of the nature of moral good and evil, and the relation of the human will to the divine. Without that the salt would indeed have lost its savour, and become fit only for the dunghill. But false views as to the will have certainly filtered through Hellenic philosophy into much of Christian doctrinal construction, especially such doctrine as had a less close relation to practical life. When great thinkers set themselves to mould schemes of speculative divinity, they could not escape the atmosphere of Hellenic speculation, on which they depended both for good and evil.

To sum up. From the first, Christianity greatly profited by an infusion of many lofty and noble principles both in religion and ethics, which had grown up in the schools of Greek philosophy. And philosophy had for some time been growing in the direction which Christianity boldly took. Yet when the Christian writers came to give their beliefs an intellectual form in doctrine, they were severely limited by the imperfect views current in the schools as regards the material world, the nature of knowledge, thought, and will, the value of abstract thought. And rhetoric in particular, which one may fairly call the evil genius of Greece, had a constant tendency to drag doctrine away from the basis of experience, and to make it depend rather on words than facts.

It would lead us to transgress our limits, if I further considered the influence of the conceptions and the language of Roman law upon the rise of Christian doctrine. Already in the Epistles of Paul we find certain turns of expression, such as justification, adoption, testament, which belong to Roman law; and even the thought is sometimes guided by the rigid conceptions of that mighty system.<sup>1</sup> On Augustine and Calvin and Protestant theology generally, some of the legal views of Paul have had far-reaching influence. But we do not find their discussion important for the creed of the first and second centuries. It was not until Christianity abandoned

<sup>1</sup> See W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*; E. Hicks, *Greek Philosophy and Roman Law in the New Testament*.

its extreme other-worldliness, and began to take up a more definite attitude towards the Roman imperial system, that the influence of Roman law on Christian thought became strong.

This brief consideration of the intellectual atmosphere in which the Christian creed arose is sufficient to show how entirely it was exposed to imperfections and errors of all kinds. Undeveloped science, imperfect philosophy, perverted notions of history, all presided over its formation. It may be that, had it been the divine will, notwithstanding all these sources of delusion, a perfectly true creed might have arisen. But God does not thus work in the world; everywhere he allows what is best to be mingled with inferior and debasing elements. In none of the processes of nature, and in none of the pages of history, do we find what would seem to a trained modern eye anything like a perfect triumph of the better over the worse. Our experience of the world would therefore lead us to expect that which has actually come about. In spite of all misleading forces the Creed contains much noble truth, fitted to guide and help men during the history of the Church. But it is not infallible.

It must be observed that our subject is doctrine, not dogma. Dogma, properly speaking, is doctrine systematised, and imposed by authority. The Councils and Senates of the Greek world had long been accustomed, when Christianity appeared, to pass decrees which they called dogmas. When the outward organisation of the rising Church had been formed, the hierarchy of the Church was no longer willing that doctrine should circulate in the community in a fluid state. That hierarchy began to consider itself the best authority as regards doctrine, and steadily endeavoured to systematise it, and to impose it upon all Christians on pain of excommunication. Doctrine bears to dogma the same relation which gold dust bears to stamped coin. But the history of dogma belongs to a later age than that with which we deal.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE CRITICISM OF DOCTRINE

THE development of a scheme of Christian doctrine belongs to a time later than that in which an ideal life of the Founder was framed, and later than that in which the anticipation of his second advent was most vividly present to the minds of Christians. Imagination and expectation had been at work, and their ardour was subsiding, before the turn of the intellect was fully come.

Naturally, it is not my intention or hope to write a history of early Christian doctrine. Such a history has been written by one of the most learned and scientific of theologians, Dr. Harnack, and is accessible even in English form. I can only hope to show, in one or two provinces of doctrine, how, according to my judgment, doctrine arose out of existing materials; how the growing organism of Christianity took possession of existing beliefs and modes of thought, and used them for its own purposes.

I propose, though in a very slight and tentative fashion, to approach another task of a far more trying and invidious character: to examine some doctrines of Christianity not only in a historic, but also in an analytical fashion, with a view to ascertaining whether they have lost, with the change in our intellectual surroundings, their claim upon the Christian Church, or at least how far they require to be stated in novel form. Such an attempt may well seem bold. Yet such attempts have in the past been made in every successive generation of theologians. And such attempts must be

constantly made as time passes, unless the faith of Christendom is to become fossilised. The notion that Christianity came into the world as a completed system, not to be taken from or added to, is absolutely unhistorical. Christian belief has, from the first, ever been growing and changing, like everything else which has vitality. And when Christian doctrine ceases to be criticised, it will have ceased to be living.

Many Christians have the greatest repugnance to speaking of the person of Christ. They are content with asserting the divinity of their Lord, and do not wish to enter further into the matter. And such an attitude of mind may be defended on the ground that they are only reasserting, in another form, the facts of their spiritual experience. So long as they abstain from inferences, and do not harshly judge others who differ from them in theological views, they occupy a position quite inexpugnable from the point of view of relative religion. To their own master let them stand or fall.

But this subjective and defensive attitude has its disadvantages, of which we have already spoken.<sup>1</sup> When once doubt has effected an entrance, it collapses immediately and completely. And in shrinking from discussion men show a consciousness of weakness. At all events, this attitude of mind is singularly unlike that of the early Christians. For centuries after the death of Jesus the most active and energetic of his followers, apostles, bishops, converts, were more earnestly occupied in nothing than in discussions as to the person of the Master and his relation to the God whom he commonly termed Father. Orthodox and heretics, eastern and western, educated and unlearned, the early Christians were for ever trying to make a scheme of doctrine which should embody the facts of their spiritual experience in the intellectual language of the age.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, any idea which is of real and vital power cannot remain in the background of the heart, but must exhibit itself in the field of thought,

<sup>1</sup> Above, Ch. III.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Church writes, "In the Middle Ages, and much more in the early times of the Church, there was infinitely more free speculation than seems compatible with Church views now. I think it must be we who are wrong. The nature of things seems more in favour of the old way than of ours."—*Life and Letters*, p. 145.



court discussion, and claim a place in the front of the intellectual movement of the time. So we are only following the example of the names held in highest honour among Christians if we too approach these serious and solemn questions. And inferiority of endowment in a modern writer, in comparison with the great doctors of the Church, may well be, in part, compensated by the more scientific habits of thought which prevail among us, as an ordinary man with a telescope can see further than the longest-sighted man without.

Indeed, there is, for modern Christianity, no other source of right views of the person of the Founder except history and experience. If we turn to Scripture, we find that the writers of various books of the New Testament held a great variety of opinions upon the subject. Similar variety is to be traced in the writings of the early Fathers, and even the decisions of Councils. An infallible Pope may be a resource, but short of that we can find no steadfast resting-place. The Creeds can scarcely be a final authority, when it is the foundations of the Creeds that we are examining. There seems thus no alternative but to face the winds and the waves of the stormy sea of doctrinal reasoning and speculation.

Any attitude towards Christian doctrine is better than the very common one of pure indifference. The Creed which is recited in church is, by the mass of the worshippers, left behind at the church porch. It seems to them like coins covered with the rust of ages, and no longer current in the markets of the world, fit only for the collector and the museum. But even if there be rust on the surface there is precious metal beneath, and a judicious cleaning may be all that is necessary to make the coins as fresh as ever.

Christianity as it stands is a fact: the greatest fact within our experience. Or rather, it is a general name for a mass of facts. It means that thousands and millions of the human race, day by day and week by week, address prayers to God in the name of Christ, sing hymns in honour of their Founder, assemble from time to time to eat bread and drink wine in sign of allegiance to Christ; build houses for worship, and send missionaries to instruct the heathen in the doctrines they themselves accept. It means that the majority of civilised

men try, in some degree, to regulate their conduct by a standard based partly on tradition and partly on the teachings of the Bible; that many of them find thereby inward peace and happiness, and in the strength of it bear death with fortitude. All these are facts which no one can possibly doubt or deny. The only question is what is implied in these facts. But the facts themselves are above dispute, and can be explained away by no ingenuity, nor denied by any reasonable scepticism. Every year and every day thousands of Christians find peace and joy in believing. Every year and every day many are rescued by Christian faith from the ways of sin, and learn to tread the paths of piety towards a fair life and a peaceful death. Every soul that believes on Christ has an inner history of struggle with sin and of divine aid, of prayer answered and peace vouchsafed which is real with a reality compared with which the reality of mere material things is like a cloud which passes away. Conduct, affection, character: these are the products of faith, and these are above the power of intellectual doubt or changing modes of thought, in the circle of the innermost life which centres in the personality given to each of us by God as a sacred and inalienable trust.

Yet though evangelical faith be thus founded on what is eternal, we are not, of course, freed from the necessity of trying to adapt its doctrines to our intellectual, and its usages to our social, surroundings. It adheres to the rock, not like the castle which is built once to last for ever, but like a tree, which requires not only a firm standing-place, but also earth and water and air. Christianity is a survival because it was the fittest, and certainly it has not usually wanted rivals. Paganism, philosophy, humanism, and many another scheme of life have tried to supplant it, and been overthrown by it. It rules in the right of the strongest. More hardy and enduring than rival religions, that of Christ has outworked, outsuffered, and outlived them all. It holds the field; nor will it ever be supplanted save by a new faith which can exert greater power over the heart and life.

And since this is the case we need not be afraid to examine it. Criticism can no more endanger the life of a working religion than dissecting its flowers and fruits will kill

a tree. Brutality, materialism, worldliness, sloth, selfishness : these are the foes with which Christianity has to contend in the great majority of hearts ; while mere intellectual criticism brings scarcely an appreciable peril, except in the case of those few persons who live a solitary and an intellectual life. And these few must learn to face the danger, just as those who live an active life must face the temptations of the world.

The popular dislike of the criticism of doctrine arises from a kind of materialism, a very natural and human materialism, but yet something very different from faith. As every man has a body, so there must be something of the corporeal about all our feelings and beliefs. Therefore the more strongly a man feels the nobler and higher elements in a character or in an institution, the more eagerly he longs to bring it out from its material surroundings and its lower associations, to idealise and even to deify it. Every one who attributes to the person or the institution nobler qualities and a more illustrious origin pleases him. Every one who says a word which seems in any way to draw the person or institution on to the level of common life displeases him. It may, perhaps, savour of paradox to call this natural tendency a result of materialism. Yet it really is such. It is because men feel that they cannot see the divine in that which comes daily, and cannot realise the ideal in the common, that, therefore, they must set apart in a higher sphere, and remove as far as possible from human contact, what they admire to the degree of worship. The spirit of hero-worship is but the obverse of the medal of which the reverse is the unemotional and materialist view of life which is so natural. Because we admire, we must raise the object of our admiration on a pedestal, lest we should lose him in the crowd. Only that which is exceptional can continue to claim our homage.

This being a radical fact of human nature, it is evident that we must feel keenly the danger of submitting our spiritual heroes, above all the Founder of Christianity, to the keen and necessarily unreverential scrutiny of historic science. "We live by admiration and by love," and that which seems likely to endanger our admiration and love, both of them very tender plants, seems likely to put in peril our spiritual life.

If, however, it be allowed that faith is separable from mere accretions, and consists essentially in a relation of heart and will to that higher power which is at once infinitely above us and intimately within us, we shall be able to view without excessive concern the inroads of critical method and historic imagination. We shall feel that, unless human nature is radically changed, the needs of our higher self must seek and find satisfaction, and that, unless the nature of the world is changed, the facts of the higher life must still form the atmosphere which man must breathe. Historical and philosophical views are of the surface, but this is of the essence. Changed intellectual views can be but a passing danger to faith: its old secular foe is of quite another and a more spiritual kind.

The great danger which besets deeper religious speculation is one which equally besets all other speculation in matters closely related to action and practical life, which makes perilous the reasonings of the politician and the moralist, just as it does those of the theologian. It arises from the imperfection of our knowledge, and especially from our very superficial knowledge of ourselves. At best we know only that side of ourselves which comes into consciousness, which is but a part, and it may be by no means the most important part, of our natures. Behind and beyond the conscious self lies the unconscious self, playing in life a part the magnitude and importance of which we seldom realise. The existence of the unconscious stratum of self is the ultimate justification of conservatism in all matters which concern practice. But it does not justify conservatism in religion more than it justifies conservatism in politics or in art.

In an earlier part of this work we contended that the main doctrines of what is commonly called natural religion, the existence and attributes of God, the responsibility and destiny of man, cannot be proved by any process of reasoning, but are practical beliefs, perceptive views immediately based upon the sensations and facts of the spiritual life. It is likely that some readers who found no difficulty in accepting these views will be surprised at the further steps in the same direction which we now propose to take; for our contention is, that if not all, at least great part of the doctrines of what

is commonly called revealed religion are of the same character ; that these also admit of verification on the practical side.

Of course it cannot be held that if we take the Creeds and the Articles of the Christian Churches as they stand, it is possible to find practical confirmation for all, or for nearly all, their contents. The Christian Creeds and the Articles are curious compounds, which grew up in an atmosphere saturated with false notions as to science, false notions as to metaphysics, false notions as to history. They contain many elements foreign to the teaching of the Founder of Christianity. They contain elements contrary to science and history. Yet the root principles of what we may call the general creed of Christendom are of eternal truth, and, if only the superimposed mass were cleared away, would be visible for what they are : noble statements of the deepest facts of human nature, and of the real relations existing between man and the higher Powers.

Of course the appeal to life and to human nature can never be so direct or so satisfactory, in the case of Christian doctrine, as in the case of the main truths of what may be termed natural religion. For proof of such doctrine as the goodness and wisdom of God, the direction of human life by divine providence, the hearing and answering of prayer, we may appeal directly to experience. And these doctrines belong not only to Christianity, but to all religions worthy of the name. They are as strongly held by Mohammedans as by Christians ; we can learn them as well from Plato or Epictetus as from Isaiah or St. Paul. But Christianity is a revealed religion and a historical religion. Every Christian necessarily attaches weight to the utterances of the Founder and his immediate disciples, and to the history of the Christian Church. There could be no man, outside the narrow limits of a few fanatical sects, who could persuade himself that his own spiritual experience would assure him of the truth of the whole of Christian doctrine. There may be, and there is, much in the creed and in the teaching of the Founder which we, with our poor faculties, would never have discovered, and which sometimes seems hard to accept. But supposing that such deeper doctrines commend themselves to the spiritual faculties



of men of our race who have those faculties in the highest perfection, supposing that in our own better moods we seem to be nearer to realising them than in the materialist moods of every day, then they can claim at least not to be inconsistent with human nature; and it would be a fatal arrogance to reject them because they do not appeal readily to the mass of mankind, or because in our ordinary daily routine we cannot realise their truth and importance. If the appeal to experience leads to a mere democratic counting of heads, then, no doubt, it will be fatal. The appeal must be made in a spirit of self-distrust. But this is the case in all deeper scientific research. The man of science has to learn patience, self-suppression, distrust of the obvious, and we have but to exercise the same faculties in the search for doctrinal truth, in order to seek it without too great danger. It is an astonishing sight to see, as we sometimes do, men of eminence in some branch of science, who know the danger of hasty assertion in their own province, entirely escape from the control of the scientific conscience when they deal with ethical and spiritual truth. They seem to fancy that knowledge of visible and material fact can be gained only by self-control and self-devotion, but that knowledge of things invisible and spiritual is obvious to every one. And yet mistakes in the one case lead only to small disadvantage, mistakes in the other case lead to wreck, the perversion of character, utter failure in fulfilling the purposes of life.

We must in our criticism of creed carefully distinguish two elements: the idea which gives birth to the doctrine, and the expression which the doctrine finds in the intellectual sphere.

The idea or general principle of a doctrine must be judged on the grounds of experience and history, in accordance with that principle of relativity which is recognised as the condition of all our knowledge. It has been above<sup>1</sup> maintained that even our knowledge of the world of sense is not, from the point of view of intellectual speculation, objectively valid. Examination of physical fact leads us only to results which are (1) valid in experience, and so practically objective; (2)

<sup>1</sup> Ch. III.

valid for all mankind, and so universally subjective. In regard to our knowledge of that with which religion deals, God and the spiritual nature of man, we can also only reach the practically objective and the universally subjective: this we have already demonstrated to the best of our ability.

In dealing with the specific principles of Christianity also we shall be obliged to stop at the same point. If they are true as working hypotheses, and if they are true for all men, then they are as true as it is possible for any assertions to be, as true as the assertion that fire is hot or grass is green.

It is clear that in transposing doctrine from the domain of the absolute to that of the relative we entirely change the tests of its truth and validity. Metaphysical arguments drawn from the nature of thought fall to the ground; *a priori* reasonings are out of court. And at the same time the progress of historic criticism prevents us from using passages of Scripture as proofs of doctrine. The place of these appeals is taken by an appeal to history and to human nature.

The doctrines of Christianity have a validity which is practically objective if they are suited to be principles of action, if they satisfy the heart and stimulate the will. Speaking generally, and not of special doctrines in detail, we may say that no religion has ever existed which had this power in such a degree as Christianity. The blood of the martyrs is not only the seed of the Church, but the best seal of Church doctrine. And the lives of Christians are not less conclusive than their deaths. We have observed that the love felt by individuals one for another is the measure of the practical objectivity which they bestow on one another. So the Christian faith, which has been passionately adored by so many thousands, may claim practical objectivity in the highest degree.

And Christian doctrine may claim universal subjectivity, if it be true for all members of the human race. This claim cannot, indeed, be allowed to many doctrines which have been regarded from time to time as part of Christianity. But it may, with some confidence, be claimed for the main principles of the faith. Wherever it has been preached it has made converts, and genuine converts have been the better for its acceptance. Such at least is the Christian contention that

the doctrine is suited to man as man, and not merely to certain races and classes.

These observations suggest an interesting analogy between what may be called the statics and the dynamics of doctrine, if we understand by the former term an examination of doctrine in the light of experience, and by the latter its history in the Church.

Examining doctrine statically we should investigate its concord with experience, that is to say its truth, in the relative sense. Examining it dynamically we should enquire whether it has held its ground in the world, and belonged to the best times and the noblest activities of the Church. But if truth in the case of a doctrine means that it has great practical objectivity and complete subjective universality, then it is clear that true doctrine will have a power of survival far greater than that of doctrine which has not the mark of truth. Being practically objective it will have great power over men's hearts and wills, and being universal it will attract a larger number of men. And the converse will, at least in some degree, hold good. Doctrines which finally prevail in the struggle for existence will almost of necessity possess practical objectivity and universal subjectivity, and so be true in the human sense of the word. Thus the same doctrines will come out best in the statical and the dynamical aspect. We thus discover a concord in the place of what was, if not a discord, at least an obscurity. For if true doctrine were merely an intellectually correct view as to the nature of the supernatural, there does not appear to be any reason in its essential nature why it should prevail over error in the Church, though we may, of course, find such a reason in the constant control of divine providence. Thus is established, from a new point of view, the validity of the appeal to history as a test of truth in doctrine.

Thus far we have spoken of the main principles of Christian doctrine. We must next turn to their expression in the creeds of the Church. And here criticism may move with bolder steps. It cannot be doubted that our knowledge of the laws of thought is more complete than was that of our ancestors, or that of the Greeks and Jews. And our notions of history are far more developed and scientific than theirs. As regards

the intellectual expression of the Creed, there is hope of progress. As regards its root-principles and underlying ideas less may be expected.

If we adhere closely to the lines of historic development we may find points as to which the nineteenth century may improve on the Creed of the second. But of course any attempt to develop a creed on the same iconoclastic principles on which the French at their Revolution tried to develop a new morality and a new religion, is bound to fail utterly.

Yet we may find in the intellectual and moral conditions of modern life certain principles of construction and progress. Were it otherwise, if our task were merely to criticise the doctrines of Christianity and to refine them until they no longer clashed with modern criticism, our attempt would be perhaps a necessary, but certainly a melancholy one. The really hopeful and inspiring elements in it come from an appreciation of what is contributed by modern science and feeling towards a permanent establishment of some principles which must belong to religion in the future.

As regards the feelings and inspirations which lie at the basis of religious life in our days it is useless to speak. No one could possibly set forth to any purpose in a few pages the outlines of the divine ideas which especially belong to our age, and which it is our business in life to realise and to appreciate. They vary indeed from country to country, and from Church to Church. The ideas are so many-sided and indefinite, and so much mingled with intellectual elements and habits of thought, that they cannot be expressed in few words. We can only say that, in so far as any writer or teacher grasps any part of them, he becomes to the age an inspired teacher. Those who live a hundred years hence may be able, looking back, to see what divine purposes were given to our generation to work out. From our eyes, at least from our intellectual perception, these things are hidden. Obedience and loyalty, not keenness of mental vision, are the qualities which fit men to bring before the world something of divine teaching.

But the communication to man of the divine ideas is a process which gradually goes on, and has no sudden changes.

Religion, and even Christianity, for us must be in all essentials what they were for our fathers. In some matters clearer vision is given to us, in other matters we are inferior to our predecessors. The ethical atmosphere, the spiritual environment of man are the same as of old. Where we markedly differ from those who have gone before us is in our intellectual habits. The progress of the present century has been intellectual in a far higher degree than moral. And, therefore, we may naturally look rather to progressive intellectual principles than to moral enthusiasms for the key to modern doctrinal construction.

Here three principles in particular will meet our observation. In the first place the keen sense of law as dominant in the visible universe has profoundly affected our views of ethics and of theology. In this matter the eloquent pages of the author of *Natural Religion* are most instructive. Our perception of the vastness of the universe, and its subjection to the most rigid law, have disposed us to realise the majesty and the wisdom of God, as our predecessors could not. And the notion of law has passed from nature into human life. The result is that a large part of the teaching of the Founder of Christianity has acquired for us a far greater meaning and depth. The saying of the Sermon on the Mount, "By their fruits ye shall know them," could not bear to men of past times so deep a meaning as it bears to us. The parable of the sower and that of the talents, and scores of other passages of the Synoptic Gospels, have become, after eighteen centuries, a new revelation to those who appreciate as we do the fixed and orderly environment of life. We catch also a similar note in St. Paul's "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And it is a note, the deep echoes of which sound day by day through men's lives, in a keener sense of personal responsibility for every action and word and thought.

Secondly, the theory of evolution which now controls all our thought as regards nature and human history, can better than the older views of creation and history be used as a foundation or condition of a higher conception of the social life of man. As to this I have already spoken in previous chapters, and shown how naturally the progress of man may



be regarded as the result of a continuous divine revelation affecting every age, and finding its manifestation in doctrine, in art, or in institution. Nothing could be more unlike than such views to the old mechanical and external views of revelation. And no change of mental attitude could have a more far-reaching or universal effect on the formulation of doctrine, and even on its substance.

There is one especial part of evolutionary doctrine which opens our eyes in dealing with religious construction. If, as some of the ablest of biologists are ready to assert, we may venture to see in the natural world a process of the preparation of organs for functions as yet undeveloped, we gain thence an insight into what we may almost venture to call the mind of God and his purposes towards the human race, the value of which can scarcely be exaggerated. It would then become abundantly clear that we live not merely for ourselves or for the present, but for the race and for the future. No view could be more humbling to reason, for future function is necessarily outside the direct ken of intellect. No view could so clearly bring out the dependence of human progress on divine will and revelation. In a recent able work,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Benjamin Kidd has endeavoured, with a large measure of success, to show in detail how each generation is constrained, in spite of its own interests, to toil for the future and the unseen. Here is apparently a great light to throw on doctrine, whether it be thrown on the past, the present, or the future.

In the third place, as we have already pointed out in the last chapter, a great change has in recent times come over our whole view of the domains of metaphysics and of psychology, through the discovery of the importance of the will, and of the relative character of all human knowledge. As the pre-Darwinian views of creation are put out of court by new theories of evolution, so the writings of the ethical philosophers, from Plato to the Utilitarians, are rendered antiquated by the recognition which has grown clearer and clearer in the writings of modern psychologists and philosophers, that virtue and vice are not questions of knowledge, but that the will, divine and human, is the great formative principle of the universe and of

<sup>1</sup> *Social Evolution.*

conduct. The true doctrine of the will is to be found in the writings of the Founder of Christianity and of St. Paul, and has ever since been struggling against the Platonic psychology; but it has usually been overlaid and smothered by it. In time, perhaps, thought may entirely discard the old established views which make life begin with perception instead of with desire and passion.

To take an instance: The older orthodoxy insists on the thesis that if the Founder of Christianity was divine all his words were infallible, his knowledge perfect. We have, as I conceive, to entirely transpose this doctrine if we would fit it to modern minds. It is the sinlessness and not the omniscience of our Founder on which modern doctrine has to insist. Sin is the barrier between the soul and God, and a being without sin would enjoy a complete and uninterrupted communion with the divine. But it would not thence follow that his opinions as to the physical world and as to history would necessarily be accurate.

In this fashion many of the current doctrines of the Creed require reconsideration. If the present writer, as must be expected, makes many mistakes in a tentative attempt to discern the form of doctrine best suited to our intellectual condition, these mistakes can be remedied by others. This alternative appears to be preferable to an entire avoidance of the criticism of doctrine, for fear of making mistakes, or of offending Christian teachers by this or that utterance.

And there is another thing which in examining the Creed we must never forget. In speaking of illusion in doctrine I have tried to show that beliefs which are demonstrably full of illusion may yet well be truer than the alternatives current at the time. It is better to accept too much than to starve the powers by too rigid scepticism. If we can find a better expression for Christian belief, it is well. But even in expressions which are out of date there resides much truth which it would be a sad mistake to throw away because it is contained in an unworthy vehicle. If we cannot find gold pure, we should scarcely throw away gold ore, because of the baser elements which it contains.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### SACRIFICE IN CHRISTIANITY

THE luminous theory of evolution, first fully applied to the biological sciences, has to be introduced into all the fields of historic science also. This is a process which must take time, and will probably serve as a task for more than one generation. In the performance of the task there will naturally be many false starts, and many deviations from the true course. And in no part of history are these more likely to occur than where the reason is overshadowed and confused by the strong feelings which arise when there is question of our cherished beliefs and hopes.

It is, therefore, by no means surprising that attempts to set forth the history of religion from the evolutionary point of view have hitherto met with incomplete success. I do not, however, propose here to examine any of them in order to establish this thesis. It will be a more satisfactory and useful attempt if I take up one thread of the strand of religious history, and endeavour to show what I conceive to be the right point of view in regard to it. Let us make an experiment, by no means *in corpore vili*, but in religious belief a *corpus vile* is not so easy to discover; therefore we must move with the more caution and reticence.

The researches of Robertson Smith into the history and the natural history of sacrifice form one of the most important chapters of historical theology. Since these researches appeared, most of the younger generation of critics have seen clearly that sacrifice is the most fundamental fact of religious

history, and that from it our attempts to trace the underlying ideas of various religions must start. As is well known he discriminates three kinds of sacrifice: (1) merely donatory or honorific; (2) piacular; (3) mystic. And although in the actual sacrificial customs among peoples at various levels of culture these distinctions do not rigidly hold, yet there can be no doubt of their value to clearness of thought and to critical science. Let us then briefly sketch the development of the three kinds of sacrifice thus mentioned, out of barbarism into paganism, and thence into Christianity.

1. Donatory. It is by a natural instinct that barbarians offer to their gods, whether fetishes, or the spirits of their ancestors, or the powers of nature, those things which they themselves commonly use and most highly value. The simplest offerings consist of food and drink, without which life cannot be sustained. If the deity be an animal he is offered a sacred abode. If he is an ancestral spirit, he receives clothes and weapons and vessels of gold and silver, which are laid up at the tomb, or burnt that he may receive by fire the essence or spirit of the offering. When ruder religion has developed into anthropomorphic idolatry, the deity embodied in his image must have a temple, and slaves to tend it; and into the temple flows every kind of precious offering. The statue is often clad with garments and decked with jewels, and often the revenue of a great sacred estate is spent in providing all things needful or desirable for the god, and for the priests who tend and represent him. Drove of oxen and sheep are butchered before him, and his dwelling becomes a rich treasure-house of works of art and objects of luxury. This was the case, as is well known, in all the great centres of the religious worship of the Greeks, Olympia and Delphi, Ephesus and Miletus.

It was only by slow degrees, as man's moral nature was developed, that it dawned upon him that, after all, it was possible to bring to the heavenly powers gifts of greater value than objects of art and luxury. That goodness and self-sacrifice in the votary were more likely to procure him the favour of heaven than any rich offerings is the feeling of true piety. And we may trace alike in the religion of

Greece and in that of Judæa, the process by which the purer and more spiritual superseded the coarser and more primitive notion.

In the *Works and Days* of Hesiod the purpose and the efficacy of sacrifice is stated in the crudest way. "Gifts persuade the gods, as they persuade the high-born chief." In a word, sacrifice was bribery, and by sacrifice the wicked man could have his will of the good. Against such a view the nobler souls of Greece, poets and philosophers, protest strongly. "God," they say, "loves the just, while he repels the proud, the voluptuous, the earthly." And even the ordinary citizen, when he brought a sacrifice to his deity, did not regard it as a matter of course that it would be favourably received, but watched closely the conduct of the victim and all surrounding signs, to see if his gift and his person were acceptable to the divine powers, or rejected by them.

A complication was, however, introduced into the matter. The deity had his priest to represent him; and to the priest, who had to live, the ethical and spiritual aspect of sacrifice was not the only one which presented itself. In the writings of the Jewish prophets we find the lower and the higher aspect of sacrifice alternately prominent, as the sacerdotal or the spiritual side of the Hebrew religion prevails. In *Malachi*,<sup>1</sup> for example, we read, "Ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." But such utterances as these are exceptional, and we scarcely recognise in them the true voice of Israel. Far nobler is the strain of the earlier *Isaiah*,<sup>2</sup> "I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." "Incense is an abomination to me." "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed." Still more familiar to our ears is the noble language of the Psalm,<sup>3</sup> "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not

<sup>1</sup> iii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> i. 11-17.

<sup>3</sup> xl. 6: roughly quoted in *Hebrews* x.



desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God."

In this manner the mere barbarous notion that gifts please the gods as they would please a neighbour gives way and is superseded. Among the Greeks it gives way to the notion that the gods regard the person of the worshipper and his character more than the character of the gift. And among the Jews it gives way to a still nobler conception, that it is the offering of the heart, *self-sacrifice*, which is pleasing to God, rather than the offering of any outward things. "I come to do thy will, O my God."

When, however, we speak of an evolution, it must be observed that such evolution is not altogether a matter of time. In the age of Plato, just as in the age of Hesiod, the ruder and more uneducated among the Greeks might well think of bribing the gods. And the book of *Malachi* is probably later in date than the early chapters of *Isaiah*. The evolution is ethical and is always going on in a nation, so that every detail of religious life and practice may be variously regarded by those whose ethical feelings are more highly and less highly raised. In part it may be a question of education, in part of natural endowment and refinement. As the nation becomes more civilised, a larger and larger class reach the higher level of feeling and refinement. On the other hand, the nation may for a time retrogress, in which case we find the opposite phenomenon.

It is very natural that modern writers who are at once Christians and believers in historical evolution should put Christianity at the end of the process of development, and make all religious history lead up to it. In this view there is some truth, but also error. The fact is that either the higher or the lower notion involved in donatory sacrifice may be taken into Christianity. But they must come in to it by no regular process of growth, but by baptism into Christ. A Christian may still lay up in the sacred house a work of art which he dedicates to God. One of the churches of Marseilles is, like some ancient shrines, almost lined with the tablets of

those who wish to show their gratitude after being saved from wreck at sea. The maintenance of the class of men who are the servants of God and the ministers of religion is a duty of the pious in modern days, just as it was of old. And the higher sacrifice, the sacrifice of self, goes on now as in Jewish and Pagan days. In a sense it cannot be raised, because in the nature of things there can be nothing higher than self-sacrifice. But the sacrifice may now be made for Christian purposes, in the name of Jesus, and in pure gratitude for all that Christ has done for mankind. The self-surrender which the Stoics made to the order of the Universe and the Jew to the will of Jehovah, the Christian may make to the Father who sent his Son into the world. There is here no question of natural growth and progress, but of a rebirth of religion in the light of the life of the Master.

We must turn to the other kinds of sacrifice, in which the same order of facts will be found still more vividly displayed.

2. *Piacular* sacrifice. Between this and the sacrifice which is merely donatory there is a broad and deep line of distinction. In piacular sacrifice a man does not merely offer to heaven what he would appropriately offer to his fellow-man. There is a breach to be healed. By impurity and transgression, whether of a ritual or of an ethical kind, he feels that he has offended against his deity. He is no longer on happy, or even on tolerable, terms with the higher powers. His life is demanded as the penalty; and he can only redeem his life by putting in its place another life. He has to make a sin-offering.

Now, as Mr. Frazer has shown, "the notion that we can transfer our pains and griefs to some other being who will bear them in our stead is familiar to the savage mind. It arises from a very obvious confusion between the physical and the mental. Because it is possible to transfer a load of wood, stones, or what not, from our own back to the back of another, the savage fancies that it is equally possible to transfer the burden of his pains and sorrows to another, who will suffer them in his stead."<sup>1</sup> And with the grief the

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Bough*, ii. 148.

savage thinks that he can transfer the transgression and the guilt, which in primitive psychology is not very clearly distinguished from it. Hence the custom of expiatory sacrifice of animals, and, in particular, the institution of the scape-goat, so familiar to all of us.

It was also felt that a piacular offering cannot be of too precious a life. Hence the Carthaginians and other peoples of antiquity in times of national peril and distress, when thickening misfortune told that the gods were angry, offered even children of their own, "the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul." The inwardly festering sense of estrangement from the gods has been the occasion of deeds of which the records are some of the darkest pages of history.

Here again we have in the records of history a more primitive and low, and a nobler and loftier view. Barbarians think that they can retain the favour of their gods, mostly deified ancestors, only by a rigorous observance of prescribed ritual and custom. Any breach of these at once forfeits the divine favour; but the favour which is lost by a mere irregularity may be won again by a merely formal sacrifice, and ceremonies of expiation. The sense of sin, the belief that ethical transgressions erect a barrier between man and God, grows up at a later stage; nor is it easy to discern how the moral element first comes in. But a transgression which is not merely formal, which makes a real breach between man and his Maker, cannot be cured by a merely ceremonial reconciliation. A life for a life is demanded, and men have offered, in many cases, the life which of all was dearest to them, a clansman, a wife, or a child. Then is added another highly ethical feature. The gods will not have an unwilling victim. The sacrificed person must go to the altar freely. And this voluntary self-sacrifice is the theme of some of the most beautiful of Greek tales; of the tale of Alcestis, who died that her husband Admetus might still live; of the myth of Protesilaus, who offered himself on behalf of the Greek army at Troy, and many others. A parallel case from Jewish legend is the tale of the voluntary death of the daughter of Jephtha, by which her father's victory was followed.

Thus as the donatory sacrifice leads up to the surrender

of the will to God, so the piacular sacrifice leads up to self-devotion for others. This is the highest form in which the idea can be expressed; and it is clear that the circumstances of human life can suggest no higher possibility of realisation. The man or woman who gives for another a life, whether by dying for him or by living for him, has gone as far as human nature can go in the divine path of suffering for others.

The ideas embodied in the piacular sacrifice have had a larger place in Protestant thought and doctrine than almost any others. Sometimes very crude notions of the substitutory sacrifice have been baptized into Christ. Theologians have said that all men for sin were sentenced to death, but that in Jesus they found a substitute to die on their behalf, and so appease the righteous anger of God. The blow aimed by an offended deity must fall, and our Master interposed himself to receive it. This view is a crude edition of the doctrine taught by Paul, and by the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which has passed into the woof of Christian, and especially of Protestant, theology. "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The sin of mankind was transferred to Jesus Christ, who bore it on the cross, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ was transferred to sinners, who thereby have become heirs of eternal life.

But such a notion was too materialist to be always accepted. And, indeed, the great teachers of Christianity have mixed it from the first with elements of a more spiritual character. The writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is satisfied with it; but St. Paul adds to it the need of faith, by which the merit of Christ's death must be appropriated. Some of the more spiritual of the Fathers thought that it was the obedience to death of the Son, rather than the actual cessation of life, which was the salvation of the world. They thus introduced that fundamental notion of all ethics, that virtue and wickedness reside in the will, and not in outward deed or manifestation.

The higher Christian view is an adoption into the scheme of Christian doctrine of the belief that a voluntary sacrifice of one's self for others saves mankind. It is impossible for modern psychology to accept the crude notion that sin and virtue, merit and demerit, can be passed about from one person

to another. Such a notion is sufficiently familiar to barbarians who are accustomed to slay the children for the father's sins, or if a crime has been committed by a township to avenge it on any member of that township taken at random. Modern thought holds that virtue and vice belong to the individual character, and modern justice demands that he only who is proved guilty shall suffer; not another in his place. And yet the harsh edge of individual ethics is turned when we look on man in society. It is, in all probability, a physiological fact that children suffer for the sins of their parents. It is certainly a common phenomenon of social life that wife should suffer for husband, or husband for wife; brother for sister, or sister for brother. In a very profound and real sense we are all members one of another, and each is responsible for all; the happiness of each depends on the doing of all.

Thus there is a profound spiritual truth in the idea, worked out with inimitable beauty of language by the later Isaiah, that it is the sufferings of the good Israelite which redeem all the people to virtue and happiness. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This is the language of prophecy in the highest sense of the word; that is, it is an expression of truth so profound as always to remain applicable, and to receive fresh illustration at every crisis of human history. The Christian Church has very naturally seen in the sublime eloquence of the prophet an expression of the relation to the Church of the death of its Founder. And Christian theology has busied itself with working out intellectual schemes by which the merits of that death may be made clear and intelligible. The great human principle in that self-sacrifice for the good of others saves the world; the Christian variety of that principle is that Jesus Christ by dying as the representative of mankind saved mankind, and that the duty of the Christian is to die with his Master, and to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church."

3. The *mystic sacrifice*. It is the merit of Robertson



Smith that we recognise the importance of this third kind of sacrifice. Often in practice it is mingled with the other kinds, and it grows from the same main root in human nature, yet it is a different branch of the tree. Primitive man not only desires to make presents to his deities, and to be free from transgression against them, but also to be united with them in one of those solemn bonds of blood-fellowship which are the strongest ties which can bind the savage to friend or guest.

Robertson Smith has tried to prove that at that wonderful early stage of development called totemism, it was a custom, on certain solemn occasions, for all the tribe to kill and eat in assembly the sacred animal of the tribe: thus by its blood to cement their union to one another and to their deity. There is considerable doubt whether totemism was a stage of culture passed through by tribes of Aryan race. But it is certain that a periodical ceremony of eating the god of vegetation was a feature of the cultus of the ancestors of the German Slav and Celtic races from a remote antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Traces of it may still be found in the remoter rural districts of Europe. And the mystic meal of communion, wherein worshipper and worshipped joined in a common repast, the tribesmen thus cementing a union between them and their deity, and between one tribesman and another, was fully in vogue among the Greeks of the historic period. It was used by them mainly in two connections. First, in the secret worship of Dionysus, which was supposed to have been introduced into Greece by his priest and votary, the Thracian Orpheus, and in the mysteries of Demeter and other deities. Some of these mysteries did not enjoy a very good repute in antiquity, and they were doubtless mingled with much of barbarism and even of indecency. Nevertheless they embodied some religious ideas which the world could not afford to lose, and their continuance in spite of opposition, and even persecution, is a proof that they responded to some deep needs of the human heart. But of the Orphic religion I speak elsewhere. The second Greek religious institution in which the sacred meal played a great part was the cultus of the dead. Immediately after the burial of a dead man, a feast was held in

<sup>1</sup> See Frazer, *Golden Bough*, *passim*.

which he was regarded as the host, and the crowd of his relations and descendants as the guests. By eating and drinking with him they cemented a firm bond of union with him even in Hades. And at intervals afterwards food and drink were brought to the tomb, or consumed in common by the dead and the living.

To the mystic feast among the Greeks corresponded, among the Jews, the solemn feast of the Passover. From what origin that feast originally sprang we do not clearly know:<sup>1</sup> we only know the custom as it existed in historical times, and the sacred legend which was told as an explanation of the details of the ceremonial. But the whole character of the feast proclaims that it was at once a bond between the members of the Jewish nation and a consecration of all to the God of that nation. The loftier idea of the divine nature, which was the noble inheritance of the Jews, kept them from any crude notion that their God partook of the feast with them, though the first sheaf of harvest was presented to him; but he had sanctioned and ordained it, and every Israelite who took part in it became, in a certain sense, the guest and friend of Jehovah.

Christianity had scarcely begun its course in the world before it also had a sacred feast. According to the accepted account, to which great historical difficulties attach,<sup>2</sup> it arose, by the direct mandate of the Founder, out of the Jewish Passover feast. But, however that may be, it rapidly developed in meaning and in character, and became the vehicle of many ideas foreign to the Passover, and foreign, so far as we can judge, to the original teaching of the Founder of Christianity. The primeval and profound ideas, which attached among all nations of antiquity to the mystic sacrifice, found in it a body of ceremony to which they could contribute a life and a meaning. The religions which were, in some degree, rivals of Christianity, more especially that of Eleusis and that of Mithras, had also their sacred meals; and the necessity arose for a parallel ceremony in Christianity, which should baptize into Christ what was valuable and permanent in the doctrine which

<sup>1</sup> Many hints as to the origin of the feast may be gathered from Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

<sup>2</sup> These difficulties are discussed elsewhere, in Ch. XXXVI.

had arisen by a natural process out of the religious needs and feelings of mankind.

In this case again we find that Christianity had to choose from a whole series of beliefs, some cruder and some more refined, any of which could be converted by the spirit of Christ. And naturally different schools and parties in the Church have varied in the form of early belief which they have appropriated. After a time the influence of the Pagan mysteries was strong. And these, belonging rather to the uneducated than to the educated, and growing in the half light of fancy rather than in the open day of knowledge, were in tone very conservative. They preserved many of the ideas of very primitive times and societies, which the more open religion of the Greek cities rejected at a time when cities all over the world were in a great measure Hellenised. Thus it was possible for so materialist a doctrine as transubstantiation to enter Christianity: a doctrine which, taken literally and crudely, can find an origin and a parallel only in the beliefs of barbarians. The barbarian believed that by partaking actually of the body of the sacred animal he was grafted into the spiritual life of the tribe. And something of this belief appears to have dictated some of the wilder customs of Dionysiac celebrations. But alike the Passover of the Jews and the Funeral Banquets of the Greeks had risen above this level of belief, and made ordinary food the vehicle of union with man and God. The ordinary belief of the more conservative Evangelical Churches seems to be a rendering of this higher development in the terms of Christian faith. By partaking of the Holy Communion, the Anglican and the Lutheran claim communion with the Head of their faith, as well as with their fellow-believers.

The view of the more rationalist schools who regard the Christian Eucharist as not much more than a commemorative rite, which binds believers together by a common memory and a common hope, may also find a parallel in Pagan times. This may be found among the more open celebrations of Hellenic religion, such as the common feasts of the members of phratries and families, partly in honour of their common ancestor, historical or legendary, partly as a bond of union among themselves. In this case, however, we can scarcely call the ceremony

a form of the mystic sacrifice, since the element of mysticism, of imagination, and poetry, has entirely gone, and we have rather to do with an institution which would be justified on grounds of social and political expediency.

In all forms of religion, from primitive fetishism to the highest forms of Christianity, sacrifice is the leading idea. The custom of sacrifice may be described as the germ out of which spring alike doctrine and worship. Assuming the evolutionary view of religion to be established, let us consider how it is likely to affect the existing beliefs of the Christian world.

At first its effects may well be very destructive. Religion may be regarded as a survival, and an unworthy survival, of savage beliefs and modes of thought. It will be within the memory of many that when the evolutionary origin of man was propounded by Darwin, the view was in many quarters regarded as infinitely debasing. If man developed from an ape-like creature, he must still, it was thought, be ape-like. It was forgotten that every human being certainly arises out of an embryo, which is in organism far beneath the ape. But the moral horror with which Darwinism was once regarded has passed away, and it is generally recognised that if man has arisen from debased ancestors that does not affect the question of what he now is. In the same way, before long, it will certainly be recognised that the truth and value of Christian faith are not compromised by any view as to its historic origin.

Two views are possible as to the relations between pre-Christian roots of Christian doctrines, and those doctrines themselves. In one view the early parallels are types and symbols, sent into the world to prepare the human mind for the higher knowledge which was to come. In this fashion, by long usage, Jewish ceremonies and beliefs have been regarded, in the Church, as a prophecy of future things. The other view is more guarded. In it Pagan beliefs and the Christian beliefs which have succeeded them are alike fruit of the same tree, results of the same tendencies working in all history, and having a more perfect course as time goes on. It is by degrees that the divine order is revealed in the world: in all things, and in religious belief no less than in all the other departments

of culture. Savages feel the stirring of the same impulses which are later the crown of human being, and embody them to the best of their power, though to us the form of embodiment may be coarse and repulsive.

In conclusion, however, I must return to, and enforce, the view from which I took my start. It is quite misleading, in treating of the history of religion, to suppose that it is a regular development through time, and that Christianity merely carries on to a higher level all the lines in which pre-Christian religion, whether Jewish or Greek, had moved. Most of the ideas of earlier religion lived on, it is true, in Christianity. But they were not developed merely on the lines of natural progress. They were baptized into the Christian faith; they were transmuted by the alchemy of the new religion, and placed in a personal relation to the Founder of it. We can find in early, in mediæval, or in modern Christianity a parallel, more or less exact, to nearly all the phases and the phenomena of ancient religion. Thus if the humblest Christian is in some ways superior to the giants of old, to Plato and Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, it is not only because he stands on a higher rung of the ladder of evolution, but also because in the time between the world has been washed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and baptized into his death. Historical science must not be treated in a fashion too closely analogous to biological science. The great personalities, the men who have received a mission direct from heaven, intervene and change the whole course of history. And among all great crises of history brought about by the working of a personality, none can compare with that from which all Western nations date their era.



## CHAPTER XXX

### THE INCARNATION

THE doctrines in regard to her Founder which the Church cherishes are mainly three. First, the Incarnation, or doctrine of Christ's birth, with which is closely associated the Christian festival of Christmas. Second, the Atonement, or doctrine of Christ's death, with which Good Friday is associated in the Church. And third, the Exaltation, or doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ, with which the festivities of Easter and Ascension-day are closely connected. By her regularly recurring sacred seasons the Church has, from very early times, directed the minds of men to these doctrines, and brought them to bear on the Christian life.

In *Lux Mundi*, the expression of the views of the newest and most progressive of the schools of Anglican thought, we find it laid down that the most fundamental of the doctrines of Christianity is that of the Incarnation. And this may well be true, though no doubt its truth depends largely upon what is implied in the doctrine. But it is, in the first place, the basis rather than the full meaning of the doctrine that we have to consider.

Some may suppose the basis to be historical. As a matter of fact, many Christians would say, the birth of Jesus was miraculous, and that miracle established the fact that in Jesus God became flesh and dwelt among men. Such a view is scarcely tenable in the face of historic criticism. The miraculous birth cannot possibly be regarded as an event of objective history. We can admit events as historical

only on satisfactory evidence. And it is obvious that in this matter there can never have been any evidence of the kind which history demands before she accepts a fact as objectively valid.

What then is the basis of the doctrine of the Incarnation? The basis is certainly the experience of the early Church. Doctrine, like myth, is an attempt to explain experience. But it is a more philosophic attempt, since it has to be approved, not by the uncritical imagination, but by the critical reason. "The early disciples," writes Dorner,<sup>1</sup> "had experienced Christianity as a divine history of their inner being; believing in Christ they had obtained access to God, in the Son they had found the Father. In the innermost, most certain fact of their consciousness, there lay for them the impulse and the necessity to place the person of Christ, the Founder of this, their new life, in the closest, most vital relation to the Father." It was a sacred spiritual experience which filled the first disciples, and their attempts to account for the experience led to the formulation of views as to the person of the Master.

During the lifetime of Jesus speculation in regard to his person naturally proceeded on purely Jewish lines. One question in regard to him predominated over all others: Was he or was he not the Messiah? It was Messiah whom the whole Jewish race was expecting, with deliverance from the Roman sway, and the beginning of a new and nobler national life. By degrees the disciples came to believe that their Master was the Messiah, though of quite another order from him whom they had expected. When and how they arrived at this conviction we can discern but vaguely in the New Testament. But in the Gospels there is nothing of metaphysical speculation as to the relation borne by their Master to his Father in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Such matters belonged to a sphere of thought quite outside that of the first circle of followers.

But towards the end of the first century, theories of the Incarnation began to make their appearance, and doctrine on the

<sup>1</sup> *The Person of Christ*. Eng. Trans. i. 47.

<sup>2</sup> The remarkable verse, *Matt.* xi. 27, stands quite isolated.

subject to be formulated. Doctrine in regard to the person of the Founder had, no less than tales as to his history, an origin earlier than Christianity. Its roots went down partly into the soil of the Jewish consciousness of the divine elements in the world, partly into the soil of Greek, and more especially Platonic, philosophy. In a luminous chapter<sup>1</sup> Prof. Harnack has set forth the different ways in which the relation of the temporal to the eternal presented itself to the Hebrew and to the Greek mind. "According to the theory held by the Jews, and by the whole of the Semitic nations, everything of real value that from time to time appears on earth has its existence in heaven. In other words, it exists with God; that is, God possesses a knowledge of it; and for that reason it has a real being. But it exists beforehand with God in the same way as it appears on earth; that is, with all the material attributes belonging to its essence. Its manifestation on earth is merely a transition from the unseen to the seen (*φανεροῦσθαι*). In becoming visible to the senses, the object in question assumes no attribute that it did not already possess with God. Hence its material nature is by no means an inadequate expression of it, nor is it a second nature added to the first. The truth rather is that what was in heaven before is now revealing itself upon earth, without any sort of alteration taking place in the process."

This fashion of regarding the world, which makes creation really a manifestation of God, which makes God the essential and permanent, and all appearance merely partial revelation of him, is eminently characteristic of the two most striking features of the Jewish mind: its absorption in God, and its essential materialism, by which the distinction of body and spirit, of will and activity, is slurred over. The Hellenic and Platonic conception, if less religious, is more spiritual.

"According to the Hellenic conception, which has become identified with Platonism, the idea of pre-existence is independent of the idea of God; it is based upon the conception of the contrast between spirit and matter, between the infinite and finite, found in the cosmos itself. In the case of all spiritual beings, life in the body or flesh is at bottom an

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 755. Trans. App. I.

inadequate and unsuitable condition, for the spirit is eternal, the flesh perishable. But the pre-temporal existence, which was only a doubtful assumption as regards ordinary spirits, was a matter of certainty in the case of the higher and purer ones. They lived in an upper world long before this earth was created, and they lived there as spirits without the 'polluted garment of the flesh.' Now, if they resolved for some reason or other to appear in this finite world, they cannot simply become visible, because they have no 'visible form.' They must rather 'assume flesh,' whether they throw it about them as a covering, or really make it their own by a process of transformation or mixture."

Prof. Harnack shows how both of these ways of thinking influenced the formation of Christian doctrines of the Incarnation. The Hellenic element was the more powerful, but the Jewish was by no means inoperative. And in fact, in the higher theology and philosophy, both ways of thinking have operated down to our own days. At present the triumph of the doctrine of evolution has compelled us to modify the form under which either the one or the other can be accepted. We speak now of the divine control of history, and the divine guidance of evolution when we Judaize; and when we Hellenise we speak of the ideal as an end towards which the actual may gradually approach. But for all the alteration in form, the principles still remain.

Those who wish to see in detail the way in which the doctrine of the Incarnation took form in the Church under these various influences, must turn to the writings of masters such as Harnack and Réville. In the present work a very slight sketch must suffice. The roots of the doctrine of the Logos are too many and too widely spread to be here even enumerated. Egypt and Babylon, as well as Greece and Judæa, contributed elements to the doctrine. In Egypt, Ra, the sun, is the divine being who manifests to the world the glory of the supreme godhead, as does the sun-god Mithras in Persia. At a far later period such ideas prevailed in Europe. Ælius Aristides, in his discourse on Athena, speaks of her as dwelling with her father, united with his being, his counsellor and companion, and his agent in dealing with the world. It is

obvious how short a step lies between this view of Athena and the doctrine common in the early Church, that the Wisdom or Spirit of God was a separate personality, a mediator or mediatrix between man and the hidden deity.

But it is in the works of Philo, who in some ways may be almost considered as the earliest of Christian theologians, that the doctrine of the Logos appears in full development. In the vague and nebulous system of this learned contemporary of the Apostles, the Logos is the mediator between God and man, God being regarded as too exalted to come into direct contact with matter or with mankind. It is quite natural, considering the extremely oratorical character of later Greek philosophy, that the sway of God in the world should not be said to be by goodness or will, by thought or feeling, but by logos, word or discourse. The divine Word, according to Philo,<sup>1</sup> "first appears as a personal helper in the Old Testament. He is the servant of God who wrestled with Jacob, and bade him change his name. He is God's vicegerent, who makes known God's will to the world, the interpreter who expounds it, the angel who rescues the godly from destruction. He is the mediator and arbitrator, the priest of the individual soul, the high priest of the world, the paraclete and intercessor for whose sake God is gracious to mankind. . . . He is the true high priest, the president and mediator of the holy community, reaching God above and men below, and representing the whole human race." The Logos is the first born of God, and nearer to him than any creature, and his mother is the divine wisdom, ever virgin and unstained.

All this language, which may well surprise readers to whom it is new, is in Philo mere metaphysical and poetical rhetoric without clear or definite meaning. But he made some attempt to attain to a more definitely historic doctrine, on the only line possible to a Jew, by occasionally speaking of Moses as the Logos. "Moses enjoyed intercourse with the Father and Creator of all, and was held worthy of the same appellation, for he was called God and King of all his people. He was

<sup>1</sup> The following passages are taken from Hausrath, *Time of the Apostles*, ii. 168. Eng. Trans. i. 185. In the notes of Hausrath every clause is justified by reference to, or quotation from, Philo's writings.



permitted to enter into the darkness ; that is, into the formless, invisible, and incorporeal Being who represents the Universe.”<sup>1</sup> Historically Moses was Mediator between God and man ; providence had made him the earthly embodiment of the reason of God.

But the doctrine that Moses was the Logos was but a poor and barren result of the contact of Judaism and Platonism. It died away, and its place was taken by another identification, destined through all ages to be a brilliant light of theology and religion. The writer of the Fourth Gospel had only to identify the idealised Jesus of history with the Alexandrian Logos, in order to inherit the rich legacy of doctrinal divinity which had arisen from the contact of Platonic thought with pious Jewish feeling.

We must not, however, suppose that the Fourth Evangelist borrowed directly from Philo, with whose writings he was probably unacquainted, or indeed from any Platonic philosopher of Alexandria. It has been well suggested<sup>2</sup> that the Christian doctrine of the Logos may have been developed almost in independence of Alexandria by a school or group centring in Ephesus. In all the great Greek cities of the East there was a rich soil for the planting of philosophic doctrine. To our view Alexandria shuts out all other Hellenistic schools of philosophy ; yet such schools existed in many places. At an earlier date than that of the Fourth Gospel, in another work connected with Ephesus, the Apocalypse,<sup>3</sup> we find a hint at the Logos theory in the phrase “The Word of God,” which is applied to the many-named rider on the white horse.

The Fourth Evangelist, as we have seen, seems not to accept the tale of the supernatural birth of Jesus. To him it probably savoured of materialism. More intellectual and better educated than his predecessors in the writing of the Master’s life, he laid aside, in this as in many other cases, narrative for doctrine. Thus he took his start not from any fact, real or supposed, of the world of sense, but from the world of ideas. We may, however, doubt how far he intends us to

<sup>1</sup> Philo, *Life of Moses*.

<sup>2</sup> By M. Sabatier in the *Rev. de l’Hist. des Religions*, 1897, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> xix. 14.

believe that Jesus himself taught this doctrine in regard to his own nature, for this Evangelist has so perplexing a way of mixing up his own comments with his text, and of transposing all that he has to say into a peculiar subjective key, that it is constantly impossible to determine what he means for narrative, and what for reflections on the narrative.

It has, however, been pointed out by theologians that whereas the introductory passage of the Fourth Gospel proceeds on the lines of Greek philosophy, yet in the rest of the work the Jewish way of regarding the Incarnation is at least equally prominent. Here and there we have a phrase which savours of the Greek schools, but the Johannine idea of Jesus as perfect in obedience, and as one in will with the Father, is in the main decidedly un-Greek. He rather indicates the path of future speculation on the Incarnation than pursues that path himself.

The writings of St. Paul are historically far earlier than the Fourth Gospel. But we think it best to take the Gospels first, and then the views of Paul. He, as was natural under the circumstances, did not start like the Evangelists from the human life of Jesus, but from the revelation of Christ made to himself. His theories, taking their rise in an intellect trained mainly in the schools of the Pharisees, have perhaps less in them of Hellenic philosophy than have the views of the Fourth Evangelist. Yet it is certain that so keen and restless an intellect, and so ready to assimilate ideas as that of St. Paul, could not remain closed to the Hellenistic notions rife in the atmosphere of Tarsus, where there was at the time a notable school of Stoic philosophy. The waves of Platonic influence reached him also.

The Christologic doctrine of Paul, no less than that of the Fourth Evangelist, has speculative roots in the soil of Platonism, especially in the doctrine of ideas, as well as in the national beliefs of Judaism. He maintains that Christ, though he came in the flesh, was pre-existent before his human life, and exalted after it. Through him in the beginning God made the world: a near approach to the doctrine of the Logos. He took our nature, in order by his death to make atonement between God and us. He was the very image of the Father. "At the

same time the Old Testament monotheism is strictly adhered to by Paul: God is the absolute cause and end of all existence, including that of the Son, who has in God his head, is conscious of being, as the Father's possession, bound to serve him, and indeed, after the completion of his work, will be subordinate to him in such a way that God alone will be all in all."<sup>1</sup>

The author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* starts from another point in his Christologic doctrine. He does not, like the Fourth Evangelist, find in the human life and the teaching of the historic Jesus a manifestation of the light and the reason of God, nor does he, like Paul, dwell primarily on the mystic union between the believer and his exalted Head. He thinks of the idealised Christ, in the first place, as the high priest and representative of the human race, and the great mediator between God and man. He sees in all the Jewish economy of sacrifice a foreshadowing of what is to him the central fact of the world's history, the death of Jesus on the cross. This one offering is a full and sufficient atonement for the sins of the world; and after it Christ sits for ever at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for mankind. The writer of the *Epistle* is in the main a follower of Paul; yet he is a man with the originality of genius, and the third founder of Christologic belief.

But in his case, as in so many others, sublime truth is mixed with fancy and deformed by intellectual aberration. Not content with proclaiming the priesthood of Jesus Christ, he has to find for that priesthood a prototype in the Jewish Scriptures, and finds it in Melchizedek, a figure so fleeting and vague in the mythic history that it lends itself to amplification and mysticism. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" seems to have floated, as detached sayings will, in the mind of the writer, and to have appeared to him a providential forecast of the relation of the Christian to Jesus Christ.

The passage from the Jesus of history to the Christ of theology was the greatest step in the intellectual history of the Church. Hitherto, Jesus had appeared as the Jewish Messiah and a great religious reformer; henceforth he was

<sup>1</sup> Pfleiderer, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 56.

recognised as the embodiment in earth and in heaven of the love and the wisdom of God. Raised above race, unconfined by limits of time or space, the head of the Christian Church had passed from earth to heaven to become the source of the divine inspiration in the Church.

But all the early Christologic doctrines would seem to many modern Christians imperfect. That the Lord was pre-existent and an agent in the formation of the world, and that he now reigns at the right hand of God, and inspires the Church upon earth, are doctrines very far short of those which have ordinarily been current among orthodox Christians. The general views of the early writers have been thus summed up by the masterly pen of Prof. Harnack.

"There were as yet no such things here as ecclesiastical doctrines in the strict sense of the word, but rather conceptions more or less fluid, which were not seldom fashioned *ad hoc*. These may be reduced to two classes. Jesus was either regarded as the man whom God had chosen, in whom the deity or the Spirit of God dwelt, and who, after being tested, was adopted by God and invested with dominion (Adoptian Christology); or Jesus was regarded as a heavenly spiritual being (the highest after God), who took flesh, and again returned to heaven after the completion of his work on earth (Pneumatic Christology). These two Christologies, which are strictly speaking mutually exclusive,—the man who has become a God, and the divine Being who has appeared in human form,—yet came very near each other when the Spirit of God implanted in the man Jesus was conceived as the pre-existent Son of God. Yet in spite of all transitional forms the two Christologies may be clearly distinguished."<sup>1</sup>

Until late in the second century, nay, until the time of Athanasius, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, as a part of the doctrine of the Trinity, was not fully formulated. We may trace the first budding of that doctrine in the *Epistle to the Colossians*, written either by Paul or by a disciple of Paul. It went on growing and varying from writer to writer. But few indeed of the writers of the second century will appear, if read critically, to hold the Trinitarian doctrine in

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 185. Trans. i. p. 190.

this matter. It seems that something different prevailed, even in the Church of Rome, till the end of the second century. For three hundred years the person of Christ, like that of his mother, was constantly growing in dignity, and strict monotheism giving ground before a doctrine which finally threw the Supreme Deity far into the background, and practically superseded him so far as this world was concerned, by a Son and Vicegerent.

In this statement there may seem, to some readers, an unpleasant note of subjectivity, as if the process in the Church were a mere human growth without relation to reality. I must correct the impression by referring to the principles of previous chapters. We cannot accept the statement of theologians that absolute and eternal fact, in regard to the nature of Christ, was being revealed to the Church, since human faculties are not capable of ascertaining or of receiving knowledge save of the relative. But we can say with confidence that it was the continued inspiration of the Christian society, its ever-renewed experience of spiritual realities, which impelled it in the formation of Christologic doctrine, though at the same time there were mingled with the working of the divine idea baser motives of all sorts: jealousy, love of domination, intellectual pride. On the whole, and regarded broadly, we must regard the formulation of Christian doctrine as a divinely ordained process. And that the doctrine should be set forth as absolute and eternal truth was a necessary result of the existing intellectual conditions.

We are so much accustomed to read in a Trinitarian light the Apostles' Creed, and such formulæ as that of the last verses of *Matthew*, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," that it requires some little effort of the mind to realise that the phrases need not have implied to their first formulators such meaning as we read into them. But the effort must be made, if we wish to penetrate to the facts of history. Paul, for example, speaks frequently of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; yet, as we have seen, he proves, by using such language as "then shall the Son also be subject unto him that put all things under him," that he would vigorously have rejected the Athanasian formulæ.



It is a noteworthy fact that the doctrine of the Trinity, as formulated by Athanasius, was a direct piling together of contradictions. And any attempt to soften those contradictions by systematic arrangement or explanation was almost certain to end in heresy. Finally the Creed *Quicumque vult* was erected out of contradictions, and piled like a great wall across the path of any further attempt at systematic thought on the subject of the Trinity. Such phenomena can scarcely be explained by those who regard religious truth as a thing to be searched out by intellect. But those who, like the writer of these pages, believe doctrine to be properly the embodiment of religious experience, will readily see that two views which are contradictory of one another may yet each of them represent true fact of religious experience. Yet the Athanasians on their side were mistaken when they supposed the truth of their creed to be more than relative. Like all creeds it was relative to its surroundings. And since the surroundings have changed it has become in that form unfitted for existence. This is indeed generally felt.<sup>1</sup> The Reformed Church of France has given up the *Quicumque vult*. And in England, though it is recited at certain festivals in the Anglican Churches, it is a cause of stumbling to many.

It is easy to perceive the value to the age in which they arose, and to the surrounding atmosphere of Hellenism, of the theological theories as to the Incarnation. To the rise of Christianity they were necessary: without them the Christian faith would not have attained the dominant position which was necessary to it in order that it might save the world, first from destruction by the arms of the barbarians, and then from ruin by the vices which conquest introduced among the conquerors. The great doctrines of Christianity were also indispensable to the foundation of modern society. Their historic justification is complete, and those who believe in the divine inspiration of history cannot fail to regard them as inspired. It is natural and legitimate to go even a step further; and to see in the philosophy of Plato and the speculation of Philo divinely

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity, writes Dr. Hort, "has been killed, one fears, by that hapless *Quicumque vult*, and its substitution of geometry for life."—*Life of F. J. A. Hort*, ii. 140.

controlled preparation for the advent of Christian doctrine. The preparation of organs for functions as yet undeveloped is a process which may be discerned everywhere in history ; perhaps not by the light of mere science, but by combining reason with sympathy and imagination.

I must venture, in accordance with the plan already set forth, to follow this slight historic sketch with a brief analysis. The necessity for formulating some doctrine of the Incarnation existing for us as it has existed for Christians of all past ages, it remains to be seen what bounds are set by the progress of modern thought to our theory of Christology. Its basis must be with us the same facts and experiences of life as originated the doctrine among early Christians ; but our mental atmosphere is so different from theirs that it is most unlikely that the doctrine should take the same form of expression.

The most notable difference between ancient and modern philosophy lies in the development of the doctrine of the will. The ancient views of the Incarnation, as we have seen, centred in the doctrine of the Logos or reason of God as revealed to man. But modern views of the Incarnation will naturally revolve about the centre, not of reason, but of will. If the will of Jesus was in perfect harmony with that of the Father in heaven, that would at once constitute an Incarnation, and enable us, as it were, to see the divine will acting under human conditions, and yet remaining divine.

It is thus natural that thoughtful theologians of modern times should dwell not so much on the miraculous powers of the Founder, and not so much on his participation in the divine knowledge, as on his sinlessness, and his perfect obedience to the will of God. It is obvious that this view cannot be based on historic testimony. It is proverbially difficult to prove a negative ; and our accounts of the life of Jesus are so slight that it is difficult to prove from them even positive points in regard to the character of the Founder. No doubt it may easily be maintained that in none of the events of the life of Jesus, as known to us, is there an element of sin : because, in the few cases in which the ethical character of one of his doings might seem doubtful, as in the cursing of the barren fig-tree, we may well suspect some inaccuracy in the

accounts. But the assertion of the perfect obedience of Jesus goes far beyond all historic evidence into the realm of doctrine. It is a thesis not of the understanding, but of the will and the heart. Yet it is not entirely satisfactory without amplification. One may readily perceive that at bottom this doctrine is in some ways rather Buddhist than Christian in character. According to the earliest Christian teaching, virtue is not merely the absence of evil will, but the presence of a will in union with the divine. Personality is a sacred thing. "Our wills are ours to make them thine"; but conformity to the will of God does not make our wills cease to be, but, on the contrary, gives them new energy and exaltation.

A critic in our day has to find a middle course between two extremes. He cannot accept the doctrine of the miraculous birth without allowing his intellect to take, in relation to Christian history, a line which he would repudiate in dealing with other history. And he cannot entirely give up the doctrine of the Incarnation without great spiritual loss, nor without doing injustice to the facts of the rise of Christianity, and its present existence as the religion of the civilised world. Between these two extremes there are many ways which have been and may be taken.

I by no means venture to condemn the garments which in times past the idea of the Incarnation has assumed. Nor would I at all imply that to the majority of people in our own days such garments are unnecessary. There are doubtless many to whose faith an acceptance of the miraculous birth is essential. And to all, the idea unembodied in some kind of doctrine would be very difficult to grasp. So long as Christians differ in intellectual capacity and in education—nay, so long as they differ in age and sex,—they cannot be at one in such matters as these. In every religion there has always been a variety of views, exoteric and esoteric: the belief of the many and that of the few. This cannot be altered. But what is possible is that the few should lay aside intellectual scorn, and welcome the true idea under any outward seeming, and that the many should be willing to learn the distinction between essence and accident, and to tolerate historic scepticism and doctrinal reform.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE ATONEMENT

THE historical basis of the doctrine of the Atonement is, of course, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. As a real fact of history, this death is probably disputed by no one. Tacitus' testimony, "*Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat,*" would be accepted by the most sceptical. But of the circumstances of the crucifixion it is extremely difficult to find satisfactory evidence. The various narratives in the Gospels bear the marks of the terror and despair which had seized on the disciples, and made them quite unfit to be witnesses of facts. Moreover, our accounts cannot, on any sound historical principles, be reconciled one with another, the seven words on the cross being a mere arbitrary collocation. But however clear and consistent our accounts of the death of our Founder had been, they could not, of course, have established the Atonement as a historic fact, for it belongs not to the realm of matter and sense, but to that of spirit and of inner experience.

It may well appear strange that the early Church, which loved to surround the daily life, and especially the birth of Jesus, with an atmosphere of miracle, has made no miracle of his death. Such attempts have been made in various schools, but they have never become a part of received doctrine. Cerinthus held that when Jesus of Nazareth was seized by the Jews, who intended to bring him to death, the heavenly Christ who was with and in him departed to heaven, leaving the mere mortal and human part of the Redeemer to suffer

torture and death. An attempt in an almost diametrically opposite direction has been made by Dr. Dale in his work on the *Atonement*.<sup>1</sup> This writer thinks that in the sufferings of Christ upon the cross there was something supernatural: a grief passing that of death, and not disproportioned to the sin of mankind. Unable to understand how Jesus could thus suffer in prospect of a death which was but to release him from the prison of a mortal body and lead him into eternal glory, Mr. Dale has suggested a miraculous pouring upon the sufferer of the untold miseries of man for countless ages.

These views, and many others, have been suggested in pious minds by the difficulty of reconciling the profound mental agony which is reflected in our accounts of the crucifixion with the divine nature of the sufferer. But such a work of reconciliation is perhaps rendered unnecessary by the doubtful historical value of the evangelical accounts of the death of the Master. The death by crucifixion was one of the most cruel ever invented: an excruciating torment prolonged until the sufferer died of the pain. Acting upon a very sensitive and delicate organisation, such as that of Jesus, the agony would be such as few can conceive. But the nature of any mental and spiritual anguish which may have gone with bodily pain has been, no doubt wisely, hidden from the eyes of men.

In the early Roman Creed the death of Jesus is mentioned only in the phrase, "crucified under Pontius Pilate," which might be a translation from Tacitus. At the time when that Creed came into being mere historic fact was regarded as proper matter of faith, as was natural when history was commonly constructed on a dogmatic basis. But in the later and more developed Nicene Creed there are added two words which introduce a great change, and show a juster appreciation of the nature of faith: the words, *for us*. These words embody the doctrine of the Atonement, which had arisen among the earliest Christians, and finds expression in the Epistles of St. Paul. But this element, *for us*, clearly does not belong to history, but to doctrine.

In dealing with such great Christian doctrines as that of

<sup>1</sup> P. 58, etc.



the Atonement, painful indeed would it be if we approached them with the notion that unless we could find in Scripture or in the writings of the Fathers justification for them, they must be regarded as unauthorised, misleading, and false. It is very different to approach them with the strong conviction that they are justified by fact. Whatever criticism may show in regard to them, it can never show that they are wholly false, for much of their grounds is not speculative, but practical: we know that they have been justified in the experience of thousands. It is not the doctrine of the Atonement which is on its trial, but only our criticism. Before us stands a great fact, which we are obliged to try to explain; but if our explanations are not successful, the fact is in no way affected. We endeavour to measure the height of a lofty mountain; if we estimate its height far below the reality, the mountain does not suffer; it is only our instruments which are proved insufficient or our calculations defective.

We must first sketch in the briefest and most insufficient fashion the outlines of the history of the doctrine of the Atonement, which begins in the remotest past.

Even among savages we find a conviction that the way between man and his deities is not an easy way, that man is apt to lose that way to his own suffering, and can only regain it by patience and self-denial. In particular, as Mr. Frazer has well shown, among tribes at the lowest stage of culture there are ceremonies of religious origin, connected with the attainment of puberty, which are very severe and painful to go through. Among Australians and other savages these trials sometimes bring men to the neighbourhood of death. Only through such sufferings and tortures can they grow into a due relation with the divine powers with which their tribe is allied. Crisis and suffering are necessary before the best life of even a savage can be suitably lived, and before a harmony with spiritual powers can oust discord.

From the sense of a relation, sometimes confiding, sometimes strained and fear-inspiring, between man and the unseen powers, springs among savages the institution of sacrifice, the most primitive and fundamental of all acts of

religious cultus. And from the first institution of sacrifice, onwards to our own days, we have a regular and progressive evolution of cult and of doctrine. In Chapter XXIX. I spoke of sacrifice as of three kinds: donatory, piacular, and mystic. And on the Christian doctrine of the Atonement all three kinds have left traces; but one kind, the piacular, is in a more special sense its origin. I sketched the way in which the notion of a "life for a life" was, in the course of religious history, gradually refined and raised, until it was worthy to be received as one of the main beliefs of Christendom. I need not here repeat these views. What remains is to consider the doctrine of the Atonement in relation to the earliest thought of Christianity.

The idea is one which inspires many of the writings of the New Testament, and which seems to have been one of the earliest and most widely spread of Christian beliefs. In the *Epistle to the Hebrews* we read that Jesus was "manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In the Fourth Gospel and in the Apocalypse, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, slain to take away the sins of the world. But the idea of the Atonement is in a special degree connected with the Epistles of St. Paul.

The true nature of the Pauline doctrine is very difficult to determine, because it is conveyed in language steeped in Rabbinical methods of thought. A learned commentator who studied that language in the whitest of lights might find it not easy to interpret. And how seldom do commentators carry a white light! Usually they are theologians, committed on the one hand to the formulæ of their own Church, and committed on the other hand to the recognition of the binding authority of the writings of St. Paul. The natural and inevitable result is that they endeavour to make St. Paul's words confirm the doctrines of their own school; and as those words are the fervent expression of passionate feeling, and not consciously adapted to the formulation of a creed, it is very easy to find in them, within certain limits, any doctrine which the investigator wishes to find. Many theologians use the Pauline writings, not as a telescope for the discernment of early Christian feeling and theology, but as a mirror wherein

to see the reflection of their own faces. I am not greatly blaming them for not escaping from a tendency which none of us can wholly throw off, but merely accounting for the difficulty of ascertaining the true Pauline doctrine on any subject.

In the writings of St. Paul we do not find historic and doctrinal statements distinguished: they are mixed together in a way very natural at the time, but confusing to the modern reader. The Atonement of Christ sometimes presents itself to him as a consequence and a corrective of the sin of Adam. As Adam sinned, and all his descendants in him, death conquered the world; and the self-sacrifice of Christ redeemed the world from death. God inflicted the penalty of death on one who had not deserved it, and in virtue of his merit transferred his righteousness to his followers, and liberated them from the curse. On this view we have only to observe that the fall of Adam was not historic fact, and the transference of sin and righteousness from person to person, as transfer and not as inoculation, is contrary, not only to our notions of justice, but to all moral possibilities.

This notion of transference was, however, quite familiar to Jewish Rabbinical speculation. Dr. Edersheim writes, summing up such views,<sup>1</sup> "Did not Israel possess the merits of 'the fathers,' and specially that of Abraham: itself so valuable that, even if his descendants had, morally speaking, been as a dead body, his merit would have been imputed to them?" Again,<sup>2</sup> "If Abraham had redeemed all generations to that of Rabbi Simon, the latter claimed to redeem, by his own merits, all that followed to the end of the world: nay, that if Abraham were reluctant, he (Simon) would take Ahijah the Shilonite with him, and reconcile the whole world." When one turns to Jewish Rabbinic lore, the result is usually to make the utterances of Paul more intelligible, and to make the utterances of Jesus more profoundly original.<sup>3</sup>

But Paul has another view which he mixes up with the story of the Fall, yet which comes from quite a different source.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Times of Jesus*, i. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 540.

<sup>3</sup> The reader may consult with advantage Weizsäcker's *Apostolic Age*, i. 150, and Pfeiderer's *Paulinism*, i. 91 and foll. It is an immense gain to have works like these in English rendering.

Men are prone to sin because they are fleshly, not spiritual. "The flesh is the expression of the power of sin in the natural life; it appears as the source of all kinds of sin, and its might consists, not merely in the inertia which opposes the demands and impulses of the spirit, but in an active resistance to the spirit, and even to God."<sup>1</sup> But through being buried with Christ and rising with him into a new life we may break the power of the flesh and of sin, and partake of the life of holiness. The notion of the inherent badness of the flesh may perhaps have arisen on Persian soil, but it entered deeply into the beliefs of all the mystic schools of religion in the pre-Christian age. And each of these schools knew of some saviour or redeemer who guaranteed to his followers liberation from the flesh, and a blissful hereafter. But in nearly all of them the pure germ of spiritual faith was buried under the weight of magic and superstition. Paul's conception of the life of the spirit was incomparably higher than theirs, and the source whence, by a divine contagion, the divine life has flowed in upon tens of thousands of believers.

Thus the Jewish or historic element in the Pauline doctrine of Redemption was little more than the husk. The mystic doctrine of the life of the spirit was the kernel, whence sprang the tree of religion.

The Pauline views of the Atonement have, as is well known, served as a basis for vast subsequent structures of divinity. With Augustine the doctrine set out on a new career. Anselm developed it on the basis of the analogies of Roman law. By Luther and the great Protestant theologians it has been taken as a corner-stone of the vast construction which is sometimes termed the "scheme of salvation." Like the women of Theocritus,<sup>2</sup> who knew all about the marriage of Zeus and Hera, they are well aware of the purposes of God when making the world, and of the meaning of all God's doings with the sons of men. Unfortunately in our days all constructions of this kind have to encounter the pertinent question, "How do you know?" and at the touch of scepticism they fall asunder like a house of cards.

The doctrine as stated formally, both in the Articles of the

<sup>1</sup> Weizsäcker, *op. cit.* i. 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Adoniazusæ*, i. 64.

Church of England and the Westminster Confession of Faith, has the great misfortune to be based, explicitly and expressly, on supposed historic fact. It declares that in consequence of the sin of Adam all men passed into a state of condemnation, from which they, or at least some of them, were rescued by the voluntary death of Christ, who thereby ransomed us, and restored us to God's favour. Now, of course, many assertions as to facts of past history can neither be proved nor disproved. But the story of the fall of Adam can be very clearly disproved, to any one who understands the nature of historic evidence; our history of mankind going back now to a far greater distance than the professed history of *Genesis*, and being entirely inconsistent with it. And if the Fall passes away as an objective fact of history, what becomes of the Redemption, which, historically regarded, is but its supplement and corollary?

But though our formularies remain, our beliefs are altered. No educated person now believes in the Fall as historic fact. But a very large body of Christians refuse to accept the logical consequence of this rejection, and persist in still holding to Redemption as historic fact. They give up the cause but retain the effect: give up the historic breach between God and man, but retain the historic healing of the breach. Yet surely if the one event is removed from the fabric of history, the other in consistency should also be removed.

Nothing could better prove the persistent vitality of the idea than the fact that every age is constantly endeavouring in some fresh way to clothe it with words, and to embody it in some intellectual system. Clearly it is the duty of our time also to find it a fit, intellectual expression. But in doing so we need not too closely follow the methods of our fathers. In the age of scholastic theology the schoolmen tried to render the idea in the language of the Aristotelian philosophy. In the age of the Reformation they tried to form a scheme out of texts of Scripture taken at pleasure, in the belief that all Scripture was the direct word of God. In our day these resources are closed to us, or at least partly closed. *A priori* theology, like *a priori* metaphysics, has gone down before the critical method in philosophy. Texts of Scripture can no



longer be cited without regard to their context or their purpose ; nor in any case are we justified in assuming their infallible truth. The method which is open to us is the consideration of the facts of the religious life, as revealed by observation and as recorded in history. Let us then briefly consider these, not in the hope of reaching at once a satisfactory or permanent result, but rather to illustrate a method, and to break ground for future enquiry.

The permanent root whence spring successive theories of Atonement is man's sense of sin, and his experience of its removal. Whence sin comes is a difficult question, as to which something has been said in the fourth chapter : why it is permitted by God to exist we know not. But that it does exist is one of the fundamental facts of ethics. We find but too surely that there is in our will and heart something radically opposed to that which we know to be good : a natural man, who, in the language of Paul, is at enmity with God. The facts in regard to sin and its forgiveness are stated in the Fifty-first Psalm with a clearness and a fervour which leave nothing to be desired. But in the ordinary course of life the disease of sin is usually cured, not by direct appeal to the higher power, but by inoculation from some soul which has already attained to the higher life. And within the limits of the Christian Church, not the visible Church, but the invisible, the recognised source of the higher life is the Founder of the Faith. As a matter of history, it may be said, Jesus died for the world, into which he brought a new life, which grew among men, and enabled society to survive the inner corruption and the outward shocks with which the Roman Empire was threatened at the time. But the affirmation of the Atonement goes far beyond the mere fact of history, into the realm of ideas. Jesus had not long left the world, when St. Paul, in his own language, was buried with Christ and rose again with him into newness of life. And from that day to this the experience has been daily and hourly repeated in the Christian Church.

To say with the Protestant that Christ died once for the sins of all is to give the idea a historical setting. To say with the Romanist that the sacrifice of Christ is perpetually repeated in the Mass, is a materialistic rendering of the idea.

A more spiritual view is that of the Mystics, who hold that Christ is always dying, whenever one of his followers learns to crucify his affections and lusts, drowns selfishness in the love of mankind, overcomes materialism by the life of the spirit, and that Christ is forever being born in the world, when character which reflects his makes its appearance among men. According to this view the belief in the doctrine of the Atonement is not in essence an opinion held as to the nature of some event which took place nineteen hundred years ago, and of which we have but imperfect and inconsistent accounts. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is a work which began in his life, culminated in his death, and has continually been repeated all through the ages. And belief in that Atonement is a process: the process whereby, in reliance on the divine grace and by the aid of Christ, a man dies to self, to the base, to the material, and begins to live to the spiritual and to God. It does not seem to be of the greatest importance, from this point of view, with what intellectual form a man clothes for himself the eternal facts. The theories of Paul, of Augustine, of Luther, or of the other great teachers in the Church, are all adapted to various kinds of mind and degrees of education. All no doubt contain some illusion; but with illusion as such, unless it become a hindrance to faith, there is no need to wage war. With intellectual growth illusions drop away like the husks of chestnuts, which have protected the growth of the kernel, and, even when it is fallen, protect it from soilure by the ground.

But no theory is eternal, and it does not even seem necessary to receiving the benefit of the Atonement that a man should connect it with the historical death of Christ. The facts of contagion furnish us here with a good illustration. The influence may be transmitted from one person to another as well as derived from the ultimate source. It is as with light. The light by which we live comes from the sun, but it is by no means necessary that we should stand in his full rays. The Church or members of it may, in like manner, reflect the salvation of Christ even on those who do not consciously venerate his name, or hold formed views as to his mission.

It is evident that in thus discussing the doctrine of the

Atonement we have also discussed the doctrine of Justification by Faith, which is in fact but the inner side, the side turned towards man, of the shield of which the outer side is the doctrine of the Atonement. But in our discussion a difference between the point of view of this book, and that of most systems of Christian doctrine, can scarcely fail to be observable. To the partisans of absolute religion the Atonement is an external fact, and the doctrine of Justification by Faith is a corollary of that fact. To the partisans of relative religion, on the other hand, the fact of experience is Justification by Faith, and the doctrine of the Atonement is an intellectual expression of it. It is not inferred from it as a logical corollary, since such a method of argument would be illegitimate. Rather we should say that it is another way of expressing the same fact: an expression which has usually been thrown into a historical setting, but which with greater propriety should be thrown into a mystical or ideal setting. The setting indeed must vary with the intellectual tone and circumstances of the successive ages; but the fact is perpetual.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE EXALTED CHRIST

THE idea<sup>1</sup> of the risen and exalted Christ is the life-blood of evangelical Christianity. In all ages of the Church it has been the source of the Church's energy and happiness; and in our day it has lost none of its force. Among Churchmen and Dissenters alike it is a never failing source of inspiration. Great religious movements still take their rise from it. Christian faith and love are still rooted in it. We must here speak of it; but we shall do so with all humility and reticence.

It is clear that the idea could not inspire the Church until the Church had lost the visible presence of its Founder. While he was in the world he was the light of the world; yet the Fourth Gospel represents him as saying, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto you. If ye loved me ye would rejoice because I said I go unto the Father." The doctrine of the exalted Christ is prominent in nearly all the early Christian writings. But it is expressed with most force and inspiration by three writers: the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the Fourth Evangelist, and St. Paul.

In the *Epistle to the Hebrews* the risen Christ is spoken of as the great High Priest, and the Mediator between God and men, as one who ever lives to make supplication for men, and to present their worship to the Father in heaven. The writer insists that the sufferings and temptations of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> I use the word idea, as usual, not in the sense of a mental notion, but of an energising power.

Christ on earth especially qualify him to feel for the suffering and the tempted, and to make intercession for them.

In the Fourth Gospel a somewhat different line is taken. The marvellous address of Jesus to his Apostles in chapters xv. and xvi. is filled with the idea of a spiritual communion and union between his spirit and theirs. "I am the vine, ye are the branches. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." There is no higher Christian teaching than this. In no words written by man does the Christian inspiration show more brightly. Yet as historical students we may gravely doubt whether such words came from the Master's mouth while he was alive. Their tense is essentially not the future, but the present. They do not prophesy what will happen to the disciples, but express the very facts of their spiritual experience after the resurrection. It is impossible to think that if Jesus had fully prepared his disciples for his departure, his death would have come upon them, as it evidently did come, as a surprise. It is not historic speeches with which we have to do, but "visions and revelations of the Lord." Whether there was some historic basis for the parable of the vine and the branches, in words spoken before the crucifixion, must remain doubtful. The parallel parable of Paul, that of the head and the members, is generally allowed to be the Apostle's own. But in any case the particular form of the parable belongs to the time of the risen, and not that of the historic, Jesus Christ.

In a marked degree the doctrine of the exalted Christ belongs to Paul. From his undoubted works, the Epistles to the *Romans*, the *Corinthians*, and the *Galatians*, we learn how Paul embodied to his intellect that Christian inspiration which led him to so marvellous a life, to wisdom so deep though twisted by Rabbinical learning, to so complete success as a missionary. That inspiration was derived, as he intensely believed, direct from Christ in heaven: the Master filled his heart and directed his steps, and imparted to him energy and love until he could say that he lived no longer; that his self was dead, and that Christ lived in him. When he came to reflect on this inspiration, and to try and explain to others its



nature, he first of all vehemently denied that it was the mere reception of Christ's teaching and the following of his example. This would be the knowing of Christ after the flesh, which he earnestly repudiates : it would make him dependent on the testimony of the Apostles, of which he is determined to be free. It is Christ after the spirit, Christ living and exalted, from whom Paul drew his inspiration.

In some of St. Paul's followers the clinging to the risen Christ instead of to the historic Christ appears to have led to antinomianism. Hence "heretical views,"<sup>1</sup> similar to those which are controverted in the Epistles of John, involving an abstract separation between the transcendent Christ and the historical Jesus, by which Christianity was dissipated into a metaphysical abstraction, and thus deprived, at the same time, of its ethical content." Perhaps, in his intense perception of his own side of the truth, St. Paul made this error too easy to some of his disciples. Certainly to the Church of that time the danger of the prevalence of such views was terrible ; for then there was no generally accepted life of the Founder. In our day, when the Gospels are in every house and read in every church, and when the lives of Christlike Christians are familiar to us all, it must needs have greatly diminished. That it has disappeared we cannot say : among ill-instructed Christians there is still a risk of antinomianism, of keeping spiritual communion with unseen powers on a different level of the life from conduct in the world. But there can scarcely be said to be risk that any important body of Christians should adopt antinomian views to the serious danger of society.

His divine inspiration is expressed by Paul in an extraordinary wealth of phrases : "It came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ," "When it was the good pleasure of God to reveal his Son to me," "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ," "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." From the *Epistle to the Philippians*, which may probably be Paul's, we may cite the phrase, "Wherefore God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Pfleiderer, *Paulinism*. Trans. ii. 162.

every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

It is probably after the age of the Apostles that the doctrine of Christianity developed most fully in a mystic direction. We have seen that in the Pagan thias, and especially in the mysteries attached to them, great stress was laid upon the relation to certain divine beings with whom the votaries held converse. To each thiasos the deity of the thiasos was σωτήρ or saviour, as bestowing purity in life and hope in death. In the Old Testament, Jehovah alone is the Saviour, who redeems his people from their sins.<sup>2</sup> But this title of Saviour seems early in the Christian era to have been applied to the Messiah, as in *Matt. i. 21*, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.” But the term Saviour is seldom applied to Jesus in the Gospels and the genuine Pauline Epistles; in the somewhat later Pastoral Epistles and 2 *Peter* it is frequently so applied. We may probably see here traces of the growth of the Christian mysteries as a counterpart to those of the Greeks. By the writers, of whom Ignatius was most important, writers especially showing kinship to the Greek mysteries, Christ is thought of as Saviour, σωτήρ, in an intimate relation to those who partook of the Christian mysteries. Dr. Wobbermin writes,<sup>3</sup> “For the comprehension of the deity of Christ in the works of Ignatius, the key is wanting unless one takes as starting-point the conception of Christ as deity of the mysteries, as θεὸς σωτήρ.” There can be no doubt that the Christian communion has been from very early times one of the principal means of intercourse between the Head and the members. Through it the sap of life has flowed from the vine into the branches.

Whatever phrases Paul may use in his passionate worship of his Master, he keeps certain bounds. He is as strict a monotheist as his Master, and anything like speculative trinitarianism, as expressed in the phrases of the Athanasian

<sup>1</sup> *Phil. ii. 9.* Revised Version.

<sup>2</sup> *Ps. cxxx. 8*; cf. Dalman, *Worte Jesu*, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> *Zur Frage der Beeinflussung des Urchristentums durch das antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 107.

Creed, is far from his mind. And neither does he himself use direct prayer to Christ, nor does he recommend to his disciples the use of such prayer. As Harnack observes,<sup>1</sup> "As the Mediator and High Priest, Christ is, of course, always and everywhere invoked by the Christians; but such invocations are one thing, and formal prayer another." But, as was perfectly natural, with time this distinction became obliterated. Before long the custom of prayer to Christ instead of prayer to God in the name of Christ came in among Christians, to be succeeded later by prayer to the Virgin Mother and the Saints. It was an evolution, the conquest of the Christian Church by an idea: one of those ideas of which we have already spoken as perhaps the most real and objective things with which human experience has to deal.

According to our Gospels the Founder of Christianity gave his followers explicit directions as to the manner in which they were to pray. They were to address the Father in heaven. Passages in the Synoptic Gospels give authority for addressing the Father in the name of Jesus. But they give no countenance to the notion that prayer may be addressed directly to the Master in his exaltation. Nor does even the Fourth Gospel, if we except the phrase (R.V. xiv. 14), "If ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do." Here, as stated in the margin, many ancient authorities omit the word *me*, and this gives a far better sense. We may compare *Matt.* xviii. 19, "If two of you shall agree as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." The difference between these two phrases marks the progress of the idea between the time of origin of the First and that of the Fourth Gospel. The custom of addressing "Christ as God" sprang up very early in the Church, but it was a development, not part of the original doctrine of the kingdom.

Christian prayer, whether it be offered to God in the name of Christ, or whether it be offered to Christ direct, differs from other prayer in being steeped in the person and character of Christ. It differs from the prayer of the Theist or the Stoic

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 174. Trans. i. 184. Mere ejaculations, like the death-speech of Stephen in *Acts*, or the concluding aspiration of *Revelation*, are not formal prayers.

as the Christian doctrine of the Atonement differs from an ordinary belief in the value of vicarious suffering. It is prayer baptized into Christ, and full of his spirit. "To pray in the name of Christ," writes Mr. Gore,<sup>1</sup> "means to pray in such a way as represents Christ . . . that means that we are, however far off, expressing his wishes and intentions."

I quote from a recent work, Mr. Dale's *Living Christ*,<sup>2</sup> a passage which expresses the facts of communion with the heavenly Master in language so clear and forcible that I cannot do better than repeat it. He writes of Christians: "They have trusted in Christ for certain great and wonderful things, and they have received great and wonderful things. They have not perhaps received precisely what they expected when their Christian life began, for the kingdom of heaven cannot be really known until a man has entered into it; but what they have received assures them that Christ is alive, that he is within reach, and that he is the Saviour and Lord of men.

"That they have received these blessings in answer to their faith in Christ is a matter of personal consciousness. They know it, as they know that fire burns.

"Their experience varies. Some of them would say that they can recall acts of Christ in which his personal volition and his supernatural power were as definitely manifested as in any of the miracles recorded in the Four Gospels.

"They were struggling unsuccessfully with some evil temper: with envy, jealousy, personal ambition, and could not subdue it. They hated it; they hated themselves for being under its tyranny; but expel it they could not. If it seemed suppressed for a time, it returned; and returned with its malignant power increased rather than diminished. They scourged themselves with scorpions for yielding to it; still they yielded. In their despair they appealed to Christ; and in a moment the evil fires were quenched, and they were never rekindled. These instantaneous deliverances are perhaps exceptional; but to those who can recall them they carry an irresistible conviction that the living Christ has heard their cry and answered them.

<sup>1</sup> *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> P. 10.

“The more ordinary experiences of the Christian life, though less striking, are not less conclusive. The proof that Christ has heard prayer is not always concentrated into a moment, but is more commonly spread over large tracts of time. Prayer is offered for an increase of moral strength in resisting temptation, or for the disappearance of reluctance in the discharge of duties which are distasteful, or for a more gracious and kindly temper, or for patience and courage in bearing trouble, or for self-control, or for relief from exhausting and fruitless anxiety; and the answer comes. It comes gradually, but still it comes. We had lost hope. It seemed as if all our moral vigour was dying down, and as if nothing could restore it. The tide was slowly ebbing, and we were powerless to recall the retreating waters: but after we prayed it ceased to ebb; for a time it seemed stationary; then it began to flow; and though with many of us it has never reached the flood, the wholesome waters have renewed the energy and the joy of life.

“Or we prayed to Christ to liberate us from some evil habit. The chains did not fall away at his touch, like the chains of Peter at the touch of the angel; but in some mysterious way they were loosened, and at the same time we received accessions of strength. The old habit continued to trouble us; it still impeded our movements: but we could *move*; we recovered some measure of freedom, and were conscious that we were slaves no longer. There still remained a mechanical and automatic tendency to the evil ways of thinking, speaking, or acting; but we had become vigilant and alert, and were prompt to resist the tendency as soon as it began to work; and we were strong enough to master it. In the course of time the tendency became weaker and weaker, and at last, in some cases, it almost disappeared.”

Classical examples of the communion of a Christian with his Master may be found in works like the *Imitatio*, or like the *Speculum Perfectionis* of St. Francis. Continually this disciple was having speech of his Lord; and the replies to his prayers took the most definite shape in his mind. He regarded Jesus Christ as the direct source of his rule; and constantly sought of him definite direction in the important affairs of life. A



more modern instance will be found in the very remarkable life of the missionary John G. Paton.<sup>1</sup> He records how once, when he was oppressed with anxiety and trouble, there was granted to him to see "in fair outline the form of the glorified Jesus," and to hear words which so encouraged and helped him that all his difficulties vanished, and he accomplished the task set before him with ease and great content of soul. And if the evidence of saints and missionaries is suspect, abundant evidence of the same kind may be found in the lives of poets and statesmen and men of affairs.

Mr. Dale is not always more successful than the Fathers of the early Church in discerning between fact and inference, between idea and historic truth. For he afterwards proceeds immediately from the facts of personal intercourse with the risen Christ, to draw the conclusion that experience thus gained can be used for the determination of events in the life of the historic Jesus. Such a procedure, closely resembling that of the Fourth Evangelist, however profitable in individual cases, is formally illegitimate, and cannot lead to any real historical certainty. When, however, writers such as Mr. Dale infer from the same experience that Christ is Lord in the moral and spiritual world, they proceed in a manner which is less unjustifiable. For here there is, perhaps, no more admixture of inference and theory with experience than is absolutely necessary for its adaptation to the realm of thought. The experience is real beyond question, and the natural inference from it is beyond question a truth: but is it the *whole* of the truth? Here lies the difficulty.

It is not difficult to see what intellectual dangers arise even in so simple inferences. We have already seen that in prayer to God we find ourselves, in Newman's phrase, *solus cum solo*, and that this very fact indicates that the attribution of personality to God can only be made in a symbolic fashion. In prayer to Christ we find the same characteristic, and we cannot but see that, however real the communion may be, we must be cautious as to the conclusions which we base upon it.

As we look down the history of the Church we shall find that prayer among its members has been directed to many names: to Jesus, to Mary, to saints and martyrs. And the

<sup>1</sup> P. 386.

important thing in a prayer is not the name to which it is addressed, but the spirit in which it is uttered. Among barbarians words and names and formulæ in prayer are supposed to have a magic force. It is probably by a survival of this feeling that many men even now consider the words of a prayer of more importance than the motions of heart and will, which give it all its value and reality.

The formation of doctrine on the ground of experience is, in this matter, as in others already discussed, a procedure not merely intellectual, but involving the practical faculties: is in fact relative. The facts of the Christian life have been used by the Church in all ages as a foundation for schemes of Christology, in which various places have been assigned to the Jesus of history and to the exalted Christ. Strictly speaking these two belong to different realms of the intellectual kingdom. And thus Christian wisdom has been continually employed in the endeavour to construct a valid pathway from the one to the other. No such pathway can have the simple and universal validity of such statements as that a straight line is the shortest way from one point to another. But in various degrees various attempted modes of conciliation embody high truth, and tend to the salvation of men.

This is a subject on which it is needless to dilate. Perhaps comparisons may be suggestive. The two carbons of an electric arc lamp do not touch; electric force has to leap from one to the other, and by the leaping, light and heat are produced. Again, there is no logical connection between an affection of the physical brain and a state of consciousness; the one belongs to the outer and visible, the other to the invisible and conscious life. Yet on correlation of the two is based all knowledge. In the same way Christian faith must leap beyond verifiable experience before it can give light to the world. There is no demonstrable connection between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Christian experience: yet on their correlation is based the life of the Church. Spiritual experience must be interpreted by him who experiences it in some way; else it remains void and undetermined. Commonly men interpret it in the light either of metaphysics or of history, and the method of

interpretation gives the key to the doctrines of churches or of individuals.

It is in entire consistency with the psychological views maintained in our earliest chapters that we assert the fruitlessness of enquiry into the absolute and unconditioned existence of the exalted Christ. In regard to the Deity we have maintained that he can be known only as revealed in consciousness, and only in relation to human experience. So the exalted Christ can be known only in the experience of Christians. And the question what he would be apart from such experience seems to be unmeaning. Those who believe in the exalted Christ can easily justify their belief. But those who do not accept this belief cannot by mere reasoning be convinced of its validity. They must receive it, if they receive it at all, by an act of faith, an effort of will which passes beyond the mere data of understanding.

The two things which may be reasonably asked with regard to a religious doctrine are whether it has practical objectivity and universal subjectivity. The doctrine before us certainly has the former of these marks; as regards the latter there is less certainty. On the one hand it is not accepted by the majority of mankind; on the other hand it is claimed by Christians that it is fit for universal acceptance. Similarly, the greater part of Christendom accepts the exaltation of the Virgin Mother; but this Protestants reject.

The fact is that, however free we fancy ourselves in the matter of belief, belief is in truth continuous from generation to generation, save in great crises. All faith has a large historic element; the impulses of the higher life are interpreted in the light of history and of our surroundings. And there is great risk in attempting to do away with the elements of one's belief which are national or local, and not of universal acceptance: only if they are set aside in order that a higher phase of belief may be reached, the rejection is justifiable.

It may be well here briefly to sum up the results of these very slight discussions on the great doctrines of Christology. It will appear that in regard to each of the doctrines of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection, we have a basis of fact, partly historic and partly of experience, and on

these bases doctrinal superstructures. Let us define (*a*) historic fact ; (*b*) fact of experience ; (*c*) doctrine.

1. The Incarnation. Here the historic fact (*a*) is the birth and life of Jesus ; the fact of experience (*b*) is that in Christian worship, and especially in reading the Gospels, we become aware of a nature at one with God ; the doctrine (*c*) is that God was made manifest by Christ in the flesh.

2. The Atonement. Here the historic fact (*a*) is the death of Jesus ; the fact of experience (*b*) is that Christians of all ages have found that by partaking of his death they find salvation ; the doctrine (*c*) is Redemption or Justification by Faith in Christ.

3. The Resurrection. Here the historic fact (*a*) is that after Jesus' death the disciples had communion with him ; the fact of experience (*b*) is the possibility of such communion in the later ages of the Church ; the doctrine (*c*) is the exaltation of Christ as a Saviour.

As time passed, it became necessary to bring the idea of the Founder, which was continually expanding and rising, into relations with the idea of the Divine Personality. Thus the views of God which we find in the Synoptic discourses were thrust more and more into the background, and a new departure was taken. Hence arose the doctrine of the Trinity, as to which I shall speak in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

ST. PAUL is the great authority for the doctrine that the living Christ is the source whence members of the Church derive their life and their energy. The author of the Fourth Gospel is the main source of the doctrine that all the virtues of the Church are imparted to it by the Holy Spirit. He places in the mouth of our Lord himself a series of statements, clear and definite as regards the source of the inspiration of the Christian community. He represents that the Founder, when about to depart, thus encouraged his disciples: "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you." . . . "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." Whether such words were uttered by Jesus is of course very doubtful: they are scarcely in his manner, but distinctly in the manner of the author of the Gospel. And it is best to take them as expressing the author's special theory, his endeavour to put into intellectual form the influence of the risen and exalted Christ. But the difference of expression between the theology of St. Paul and the theology of the Fourth Gospel is not very great, nor of much moment if religion be practically regarded.

In fact the Fourth Evangelist continues the lines of the pre-Christian speculation which Philo also independently works on. The Alexandrians had spoken of the Mediator between God and the world sometimes as of feminine nature, the Wisdom of God sometimes as of masculine nature, the Word



or the Son. The Fourth Evangelist regards Jesus as the impersonation of the Logos, and the Paraclete as the source or channel of inspiration to the Christian Church after the departure of Jesus. He did not adopt these views from Philo, with whose works he was probably unacquainted; but both writers have common intellectual ancestors.

In the case of the Holy Spirit, just as in the case of Jesus Christ himself, we have to beware of attaching more value to tales of doubtful authority than to the facts of the religious consciousness. For in the Gospels and the *Acts*, as they have come down to us, certain appearances of the Holy Spirit under the forms of time and sense are recorded. When Jesus was baptized, as all the Evangelists record, the Holy Spirit descended upon him; in the form, it is sometimes added, of a dove. And on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were assembled, there was a sound as of a mighty wind, and the Spirit fell upon each in the form of a tongue of fire, after which they received the gift of tongues. When, however, we begin carefully to examine the records of these facts, we find that those records are of an unusually unsatisfactory character.

It seems, from the words used by Matthew and Mark,<sup>1</sup> that the appearance of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in the form of a dove was to them a subjective vision: the words *he saw* are suggestive, and that the sight was visible to others is in no way expressed nor even implied. In the narrative of the Third Gospel, by the omission of the words *he saw*, a more objective character is given to the vision, as if it were a fact visible to all; but even in this case nothing is said which compels us to consider that this was the intention of the writer: his omission of one or two words of the traditional version may have been due to other causes. In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, John the Baptist is represented as saying, "*I saw* the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." In this case, too, a vision peculiar to the Baptist seems to be implied; but the whole passage can scarcely make any pretence to be historical, since the context, in which these utterances of John are contained, contains also

<sup>1</sup> *Mark* i. 10. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him.

phrases of early Christian theology, which could scarcely have been uttered by the Baptist at the outset of his career.<sup>1</sup> The Apocryphal Gospels speak of a light appearing or a fire being kindled on the occasion.

If we attempt, amid these conflicting accounts, to determine what as a matter of history took place, we shall find ourselves completely baffled. One school of critics may hold that we have to suppose a vision seen by Jesus, paralleled by that of Ezekiel and by those of other ancient prophets, who introduce them with the same simple phrase *I saw*, unconcerned with the question whether the vision was subjective or objective. It may suit the minds of some unimaginative persons to suppose that a dove, a bird in Palestine very common and quite familiar with man, did flutter about Jesus at his baptism. But such a supposition is quite superfluous. It is noteworthy that with Philo, who wrote before the Gospels were composed, a dove is recognised as a symbol of the divine wisdom. The enquiry for historic fact ends in a dead-lock.

In regard to the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the early disciples we have two accounts, differing markedly one from the other. The one is found in the Fourth Gospel, the other in the book of *Acts*. In the Fourth Gospel it is recorded that Jesus promised to his followers, in his last discourses, that the Holy Spirit should be given them after his departure. And when, on the evening of the Resurrection, the disciples were assembled with shut doors for fear of the people, Jesus appeared among them, and breathing on them said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose-soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose-soever sins ye retain, they are retained."<sup>2</sup> This passage has had an important history. On it the Church of Rome bases her claim to the power of remitting sins. And in the Anglican service for the ordering of priests it is also treated as the basis of priestly authority, though the Anglican Church does not encourage the confessional, without which the power of absolution is utterly crippled.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is

<sup>1</sup> *John* i. 29. "The lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." There seems here to be an allusion to the Paschal sacrifice, which could only have been uttered after the Crucifixion.

<sup>2</sup> *John* xx. 22.

recorded by the writer of the *Acts* as coming to the disciples on a different and a subsequent occasion, while they were gathered together in one place. He represents the result of that descent, the gift of tongues, as causing wide-spread interest and astonishment at Jerusalem. As it stands the narrative is clearly miraculous. But the letters of St. Paul enable us to be sure that it is at least a highly coloured version. On this subject I have said enough in an earlier chapter. We cannot therefore but suppose that the character of the "gift of tongues" on the day of Pentecost was entirely mistaken by the author of the *Acts*: and this being so, can we trust him as to the presence of the tongues of fire? These bear a curious likeness to the fire which, according to apocryphal authority, appeared at the baptism of Jesus himself in the Jordan.

With the vast constructions reared on what must from the historical point of view be called so slight a foundation, I do not propose here to deal. But it is necessary to point out that the whole passage which we have cited from the Fourth Gospel is irreconcilable with the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit, as given in the *Acts*. For if the disciples had already received the gift of the Holy Spirit, why should they wait to receive it formally on the day of Pentecost.

It appears then that the accounts of the appearance of the Holy Spirit in visible form are not historically convincing. But if we give them up, we do not therewith give up our belief in the working of the Spirit of God in the human heart and mind and conscience, which is a reality of experience to all religious men. The tales wherein the experience had found support passes away, but that experience is deeply embedded in the facts of the spiritual life, and may still be embodied in doctrine.

As we have already seen, in speaking of the Logos doctrine, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit existed before the rise of Christianity. In fact the divine Spirit, the divine Wisdom, and the divine Word were three phrases used for speaking of the same range of spiritual experiences in the Jewish Hellenistic schools. To Philo the divine Wisdom is scarcely to be distinguished from the Word. A descendant of these views appears in Christian literature, when Jesus is represented as speaking of

"My mother, the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> When the Parthenon at Athens became a Christian Church it was dedicated, first to the divine Wisdom and then to the Virgin Mary. The working of God in the world and in the souls of men was by the later Jews personified in many ways, and the Christian doctrines of the Word, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Virgin Mother alike had roots in these personifications.

The doctrine of the person of the Holy Spirit remained for a long time in the Church in a state of flux. "The conceptions about the Holy Spirit were quite fluctuating. Whether he is a power of God, or personal, whether he is identical with the pre-existent Christ, or is to be distinguished from him, whether he is the servant of Christ (Tatian, *Orat.* 13), whether he is only a gift of God to believers, or the eternal Son of God, was quite uncertain."<sup>2</sup> It was long afterwards that mechanical formulæ, such as those of the so-called Athanasian Creed, attempted to give a scientific air to doctrinal assertions, which it is fatal to regard as objectively scientific. The value of the doctrine to Christianity arose from the Christian baptism which it underwent. It came to embody some of the most sacred experiences of the early Church.

Let us turn from the outward appearances of the Holy Spirit to the inward revelations, of which mention is made in the New Testament. One of the simplest and most natural mentions is put into the Founder's mouth in St. Luke's Gospel,<sup>3</sup> "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" This is the language of essential religion, fit for all times and places, as appropriate to-day as when it was uttered or written. Here we have touch of the eternal facts on which faith must be built. But as we recede a little farther from the fountain-head, we find the term *Holy Spirit* used with special or exclusive reference to the Christian Church. Thus St. Paul,<sup>4</sup> after reminding his Corinthian converts that they have become

<sup>1</sup> In the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, as quoted by Origen.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, i. 188. Trans. i. 197.

<sup>3</sup> xi. 13.

<sup>4</sup> 1 *Cor.* vi. 15-19; xii. 3.

members of Christ, proceeds immediately to speak of their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. And he declares that no man can call Jesus Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. He regards the Holy Spirit, as does the Fourth Evangelist, as the special vehicle of grace to the members of the Christian Church, and not to those outside the Church.

And this restriction of the operations of the Holy Spirit to Christians appears in a more definite and outward form in the *Acts*, of course a later and far less trustworthy authority than St. Paul's Epistles. In this book, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on converts appears as the sign of their admission into the Church, and frequently accompanies baptism, either following it, or, as in the case of Cornelius, preceding it. And the results of the bestowal of the Spirit are spoken of as externally visible, especially consisting in speaking with tongues.<sup>1</sup> Such phenomena are common features of religious revivals; we do not now connect them with baptism, since infant baptism has almost superseded that of adults. But in connection with what is now called conversion, and with partaking of the Holy Communion, it is not rare to see such a change of heart and purpose, accompanied by strong emotion and passionate alterations of sorrow for sin and joy in forgiveness, as would have been termed by the piety of the early Christians the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

In some passages of the *Acts* we read of a more external and arbitrary bestowal of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is sometimes<sup>2</sup> not bestowed at baptism, but after baptism by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, so that Simon Magus asks from the Apostles that he also may have the power that "on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Ghost." In this passage we have reached the thaumaturgic view, that the gift of the Spirit of God or its withholding rested in the hands of certain individuals. And at a glance we see how far the feeling of the early Christians has departed from acceptance of the noble phrase of the Fourth Gospel,<sup>3</sup> "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou

<sup>1</sup> Most instructive is the whole account of the conversion of Cornelius, *Acts* x. 44.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* *Acts* viii. 15-17.

<sup>3</sup> iii. 8.



hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The translation of the doctrine of the Spirit out of the sphere of true spirituality into that of materialism may have been at the time necessary, in order that Christianity should exercise full power in a very imperfect world. Through being thus materialised, the doctrine was fitted to become a justification and a basis for the organisation of the early Church by means of the system of apostolic succession. A crust of outward observance was necessary to save the infant Church from being crushed between the hard and prosaic Roman and the fierce and fanatical Jew. But the tendency of modern evangelical Christianity is to put, over against this hard and sacerdotal conception, that of a divine power which has by degrees, through all the ages, revealed God to man. Even among savages we may find traces of a divine inspiration, which makes them forsake the worse and choose the better. The philosophers of Greece and the prophets of Israel alike received revelations proceeding from the divine mercy and goodness. But in Jesus Christ the divine influence which had been flowing like streams in a thirsty land became a full river. And since the death of the Master, that river has flowed for his disciples, and been the life of the Church visible and invisible. But divine inspiration, though fullest in the Church, is no more confined to the Church than it was in old days confined to the Jewish nation. "God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him."<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary, at this point, to say a few words in regard to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. According to Prof. Harnack, who in a matter of history is a very high authority, the doctrine of "Three Persons in one Godhead," which is not really accepted in the earlier creeds, was introduced into the Creed under the influence of Greek metaphysics in the fourth century. But it is more than likely that ultimately it had not merely a philosophic source, but also one in cultus, since in the Greek mysteries, which certainly largely

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 34.

influenced Christian doctrine, trinities of deities were commonly accepted.

The theologians of the orthodox or victorious party acknowledged in their formulæ a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in cult and in practice there was rather a Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Virgin Mother.

In the history of the Church the value of the doctrine has arisen from the support and cohesion which it has given to the great doctrines of Christianity: the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the exalted Christ. It was thus thoroughly Christianised, and turned from a metaphysical speculation, or even a bit of Pagan mysticism, into the practical embodiment of Christian inspiration.

Clearly it is by the incorporation of the doctrine of Christ that the doctrine of the Trinity was baptized into Christianity. And the doctrine of the exalted Christ rests, as we have shown, on a basis of Christian experience continued through all ages down to our own. Yet in this process of incorporation results were reached which, however necessary at the time, have now become hindrances to faith. It was through the doctrine of the Logos that the divinity of Christ was established. And it was an essential part, historically, of the Logos doctrine that, through the word of God, heaven and earth were made. In the Jewish and Alexandrian philosophy such a phrase would be quite unexceptionable; and when we read in the Epistles of the New Testament that "By the word of God the heavens were of old," or that "The worlds were framed by the word of God,"<sup>1</sup> the phrases are quite free from incongruity. But when in Christian theorising Jesus was identified with the Logos of God, then the associations of the phrase become misleading. Jesus Christ was God revealed in man, not in the order of nature. Yet it was inevitable that as Logos Jesus Christ should be regarded as architect of the visible world, as we have it in the Nicene Creed, "by whom all things were made." This confusion between the author of nature and the human revelation of God does very much in

<sup>1</sup> 2 *Peter* iii. 5; *Heb.* xi. 3. In the former case the word used is *λόγος*, in the latter *ῥῆμα*.

our day to make Christian doctrine unacceptable to those trained in the schools of science.

If regarded from the abstract point of view, as metaphysical truth, the doctrine of the Trinity will not bear criticism: its value must be practical rather than speculative. The doctrine of the Trinity, regarded in the fashion in which in the present work doctrines are regarded, can be no statement of absolute truth in regard to the being of God as existing out of relation to the world: all our words in regard to God must either speak of him in relation to the world of consciousness and experience, or else have absolutely no meaning. Nor is the doctrine a mere logical deduction from texts of Scripture. Scripture texts were neither intended by their writers to be thus used nor are they, unless verbally inspired, fit to support a logical superstructure; nor is our reason, even if the texts were verbally inspired, capable of logical procedure outside the limits of experience. The doctrine is not, indeed, entirely independent of history, since history is recorded experience, but yet it is independent of all disputable historical assertion, and in the main a summary of spiritual experience in an intellectual form.

By many thinkers of modern times the doctrine of the Trinity has been accepted, and many attempts have been made by them to put it forth in a form suited to modern conditions of thought. I must hold, in accord with the position taken up throughout this book, that when such attempts consist in *a priori* views, or are based on metaphysical reasonings, they cannot have permanent value. But if they are based on the data of experience, they may be not only legitimate, but even useful to Christian thought and belief. So, with the utmost diffidence, I venture to suggest that the experiential basis of the doctrine may be the following:

To the Christian world God is revealed in three ways: (1) in the order and law of the visible and intellectual worlds; (2) in the life and the work of Jesus Christ, both in earth and heaven, and in ideal humanity; (3) directly to the human heart, by graces and inspirations. These seem to be the foundations on which the intellectual structure is reared, a structure varying from age to age, but never wholly detached

from its basis in human nature and practical life. The particular structure of which the *Quicumque vult* is the best known account is by no means irreproachable. It doubtless had its use in the history of the Church. But it is not in such form that the doctrine of the Trinity can ever take real hold of the modern world.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE FUTURE LIFE

AMONG the most important of religious doctrines are those which relate to the life beyond the grave. They are in the highest degree ethical, and have a bearing upon life so direct that to attack them is to attack in its most vital point the religion to which they belong. But there is a necessary weakness in their foundation. For whereas most of the doctrines of which we have hitherto spoken rest upon a basis of fact and experience, the doctrine of the future life cannot immediately thus rest. For by the very nature of the case our experience is confined by the bounds of the present life, and is relative to existing conditions. We are unable to determine, from the observation of facts, the nature of that which necessarily lies outside experience. Nevertheless the religion of experience may take up a position in regard to the future life quite different from that of the mere Agnostic. And experience is, in the end, the basis of the Christian view.

We must begin by sketching in outline the history of the doctrine in the ancient world.

The belief in the persistence of human life beyond the grave is found among almost all tribes of barbarians throughout the world. Generally speaking, the future life is supposed to resemble the past life in character, but to be a softened and ghostly supplement to it. The dead man, whether he lives on in the tomb or passes away to a distant realm of shadows, is in character and essentials just what he was during life, but



incorporeal and endowed with certain faculties which the living man has not. The earliest literature of the Greeks and of the Jews mirrors this stage of belief: its best poetical expression is to be found in the Homeric account of the visit of Odysseus to the world of shades, the prototype of which the descents into Hades of Æneas and of Dante are copies. The Cultus of the Dead, which was a marked feature of ancient religious life, was based upon this view. Men brought at stated seasons offerings to their dead ancestors, and expected in return their help to protect the tomb where they were buried, and the land which they had tilled.

In this primitive view, as in all the beginnings of religious doctrine, there is little or nothing ethical. Yet the view was eminently well adapted to receive an ethical turn. In ancient Egypt we may best trace its transformation into a sanction of morality. The Egyptians believed with great intensity in the future life, and that its happiness or misery for individuals depended upon the character of the deeds done in the flesh, whether they were good or evil. There was a judgment of souls, and only he escaped the jaws of the destroyer and entered into bliss whose heart was righteous, who had not oppressed the poor nor defrauded the helpless.

This doctrine of final retribution and a judgment of souls was commonly accepted in Greece, though it belonged rather to the mysteries of Demeter and the mystic theology of the Orphic sects than to the civic religion. A close examination of the remains of Greek poetry, philosophy, and art, reveals to us a strong undercurrent in religion, in which was much of superstition and magic, but also more ethical and spiritual views in religion than usually appeared on the surface.

The philosophers, and especially Plato, dipped much into this undercurrent, and embodied many of its beliefs and hopes in the idealist and spiritual metaphysics of Greece. Plato, in particular, developed on a mystic basis his doctrine of the immortality of the soul. This conception of immortality is essentially philosophic, and stands very far from the barbarian's notion of mere continued existence, or even the Orphic eschatology. The grounds on which Plato seeks to establish it are felt by every reader to be inadequate; but the ethical passion which

he or his great master infuses into the conception is a sign of the noblest inspiration. And writer after writer and sect after sect in Greece started from the Platonic views and modified them, or carried them further, or maybe opposed them.

In later Greece the barbaric, the Orphic,<sup>1</sup> and the philosophic views of the future life all existed side by side among different classes of the community. All of these had undergone softening and civilising processes as the Greek race worked out its destinies. To the barbaric belief in continued existence a gentle and humane turn had been given by the growing family feeling, the desire for a reunion in Hades, which is reflected clearly in the beautiful sepulchral reliefs which fill the museum of Athens, and which constitute the most charming picture which exists of family affection. The Orphic belief in rewards and punishments had been exalted and made more spiritual by the increasing closeness between the believer and his Saviour-Deity, to whom the votary trusted for safety amid the perils of the last journey and in the final judgment of souls. The philosophic doctrine of immortality had become less vague and negative, more suffused with the colours of hope, and with desire for converse with the gods.

We next come to the Jews.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew race was for a long time content to trace the providence of God and the workings of divine justice in the present life. It accepted the ordinary barbaric notion of the future life, but without transposing it into the ethical key. Meantime, and probably first during that Captivity which was the redemption of the Jewish race, there arose in the people an intense hope or conviction of a future deliverance and a coming Messiah. At first the deliverance and triumph were thought of as purely national; but by degrees a redemption and retribution of the individual was thought of, and the facts of life soon suggested that for individuals such retribution could only reasonably be looked for on the other side of the grave.

<sup>1</sup> As to the Orphic views of Hades and their influence on early Christianity see above, in the chapter on the Descent into Hades. A chapter on Greek ideas as to the future life is included in my *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas*.

<sup>2</sup> In the following paragraphs I have done little more than abridge the views of Schürer, *Jewish People*; Eng. trans. ii. p. 129 and foll. See also the fifth volume of Renan's *Hist. du peuple d'Israel*.

But the line of development of hope in death took, among the Jews, a line quite different from that which it had taken among the Greeks. It was strongly under the influence of the sense of a national divine mission which was deeply rooted in the Jewish conscience. So, instead of meditating on a personal immortality, the Jews dreamed of a great crisis when, in the days of the coming Messiah, a general resurrection of the dead Israelites should take place, and when they should reign from a purified New Jerusalem over the whole Gentile world. No doubt there mingled with this national aspiration in the Hellenistic age a hope of future bliss for the worthy, and a dread of future punishment for the unworthy son of Israel; but the difference between Jew and Gentile was so profound that even moral distinctions paled beside it; and to the last the Jewish hope was national as the Greek hope was individual.

I have had occasion more than once to speak of the energy with which early Christianity absorbed the Jewish beliefs as to the Messiah, the general resurrection, and the end of the existing world. The form taken by these beliefs in the early Church is best exhibited for us in the book of *Revelation*. Some modern writers think that the basis of this book was Jewish rather than Christian; that it is a Jewish Apocalypse modified and supplemented by a Christian hand. But whether this be the case or not, the vision of the New Jerusalem, with its twelve gates inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the earthly victories of the Messiah, and the millennial reign of the saints, are thoroughly Hebrew. And Hebrew also is the notion of those who had been slain for the word of God resting under the altar of God, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell in the earth?"

In tracing the Hellenic and the Jewish notions of the future life into Christianity we must begin with the Founder. If we turn attentive eyes to his teaching on the subject, we shall see with some astonishment how little he dwelt upon the life beyond the grave, and how reticent is his teaching, as recorded in the Synoptists, in regard to it. Paley long ago made this observation; and it is not, I presume, denied anywhere, though usually overlooked. And if we examine the

passages where sayings in regard to the future life are reported of Jesus, many of them will appear to be not authentic. The passage about the "many mansions" comes in St. John's Gospel in the midst of a discourse which, however beautiful, is not at all in the manner of Jesus, but in that of the writer of the Gospel. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is obviously a tale with a moral, a parable, the literal truth of which is not implied any more than is that of the story of the Good Samaritan. In St. Mark's Gospel there are but two or three phrases set down in reference to the future life: "In the age to come eternal life"; "When they shall rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven"; "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Some of the parables reported in the First Gospel contain somewhat more definite teaching, such as "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." This phrase, however, belongs to the parable of the sheep and the goats, in regard to which I have observed, in a previous chapter, that it seems to have been recast by the early Christian society. It is impossible to decide with certainty whether the phrases here used, eternal life and everlasting punishment, really come from the Founder of Christianity. They are so accepted by current belief, and popular feeling accepts the former of them as promising to Christians an eternity of personal happiness. Our ancestors had no difficulty in accepting also the latter phrase as implying that the wicked and the unbelieving were destined to an eternity of personal torment. At the cost of logic, modern feeling refuses to believe either that punishment in a future life can be eternal, or that Jesus can have spoken of it as such. This feeling is no doubt a Christian and humane development. It is impossible to think that a little balance of good or evil in the life will determine the destination of the souls of men to an eternity of personal happiness, or an eternity of torment. But the goodness of this sentiment does not justify us in dealing fast and loose with authority and with creed. And such laxity has its revenges. People who reject eternal punishment often reject with it all idea of future reward and punishment, and even of divine justice, falling in this matter to a lower level than Mohammedans and Buddhists.

They think of the divine Judge as a good-natured ruler who will not deal hardly with any one. But it would be difficult to name any serious religious teacher who has held this view of the future life, utterly inconsistent as it is with all facts of experience.

A well attested saying as to the future life by the Founder of Christianity, is that in the world to come "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God." This phrase again is strangely neglected by modern popular Christianity, which often places in the next world a mere continuation of the family life, too often selfish and exclusive, of this world. No doubt the hope of finding again relatives who have gone before softens, in many a household, the bitterness of death and gives a sanction to family affection. It may well be that in those family attachments which lie at the root of so much virtue and so much character there may be elements of a nature not to be destroyed by the fierce furnace of death. But as a matter of history this hope came into early Christianity not from a Jewish source, nor in all probability from the Founder, but from Paganism. The beautiful reliefs which adorn the Greek graves of all periods from the sixth century downwards commemorate, beyond all things, the lasting character of family affection; and no doubt Greek piety in many cases associated them with a reunion in the realm of Hades. Antigone in the play of Sophocles expresses a hope of rejoining her parents and her brother in the future world. The Socrates of Plato in his last hours gives utterance to the hope that he is about to join the assembly of the good and the wise who had preceded him. But the reported teaching of the Founder of Christianity is set in a different key, and gives little countenance to the easy dreams of popular optimism. The saying "He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" has an application in this matter.

But the great benefit which the doctrine of the future life received through the teaching of the Founder of Christianity was bestowed by his doctrine of divine Providence, by his emphasis on the perfect confidence which we may feel in the goodness of the Father in heaven. The disciple was taught



that "the hairs of his head were all numbered"; that a divine Providence watched his downsittings and uprisings, and was acquainted with all his ways: that in the daily walk of life no smallest thing can happen without divine knowledge and control. Those on whom this knowledge was deeply impressed by authoritative teaching and by daily experience, became ready also to trust God in what is greatest. Socrates could not believe that death was an evil, because at its approach he received no monition from the inward voice which always warned him when any evil was near. Similarly the Christian was assured that death, which is appointed as the lot even of the best and worthiest of our race, cannot be an evil in itself; and that the Providence which watches over life will also protect in death, and save from the sting of it.

In the early Church the doctrine of the future life developed in two directions.

First, the Jewish doctrines of a coming of the Messiah, of the resurrection of the body, and of a millennial reign of the saints, were taken up into Christianity and greatly dominated the imaginations of the early disciples. And second, the mystic doctrine of the union of the believer with a divine Redeemer, a union begun in the present and continued in the future life, was by St. Paul and by the Fourth Evangelist baptized into Christ, and became one of the mainsprings of the Christian life. No doubt both views grew up together, and were inextricably intermixed. Their radical inconsistency one with another was not realised by the first disciples. Both were adopted by St. Paul. But inasmuch as the Jewish view was temporary and materialist, it was destined slowly to fade; while the more spiritual and mystic doctrine preserves its freshness even to our days. Let us examine some passages of the Pauline writings; and first those in which the Judaising element is prominent.

The Christian imagination in regard to the future life has been much dominated, and is still largely influenced, by the remarkable passages on the subject in the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, and the first to the *Thessalonians*, passages full of a noble spirit and of lofty eloquence. But when we stop our

ears to the ring of their eloquence, and try to put aside from our hearts the glorious associations with which Christendom has covered them, and enquire into their evidential value, the result is not reassuring. Both passages are steeped in two great errors, first, that the second coming of Christ was close at hand, and second, that the question of the future life was bound up with that of the resurrection of the body. Between these two errors there is an obvious connection, since the resurrection of the bodies of the newly dead at Christ's near appearance might easily seem less impossible than can now appear to us the resurrection of the dead bodies of all who have lived from the beginning. The Apostle had certain distinctive views, the full discussion of which would be very interesting, as to the spiritual body, and changes of the material into the immaterial. Into all this we cannot follow him; and it is evident that the imperfection of science in his time must render his views, upon a subject properly scientific, of comparatively small value. In the very early period of the Church, speaking generally, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body was not held either strongly or universally. Many early creeds read "Resurrection from the dead" for "Resurrection of the flesh." It was only during the contest with Gnosticism<sup>1</sup> that the Church, dreading lest the whole doctrine of the resurrection should evaporate into meaninglessness, began to insist on the resurrection of the *body* as essential. In the existing state of physical and metaphysical science, no other line was open to her. But the necessities of the second century are no test of the creed of the nineteenth century.

Such were the speculations of St. Paul as to the end of the world and the resurrection of the body while he was yet in the full vigour of life; when he expected to remain alive until he should be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. As death came nearer to him, he should naturally have expected to lie in the grave until his Master came to call him forth. But meantime his doctrine, or rather his passion of the living and exalted Christ, had acted strongly on mind and heart, and he began to feel the power of that doctrine in the question of the

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *Apost. Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 28.

future life.<sup>1</sup> Then it was that "to depart and to be with Christ was far better," that to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord. Practically he had drifted away from the Jewish eschatology, and built a far nobler hope on his doctrine of the exalted Christ. The life that he lived, he lived in Christ; Christ lived in him; therefore death had no more power over him; but when his body was thrown aside, he would at once become joined to his living Master, and so for ever be with the Lord.

This is the spiritual Christian doctrine of St. Paul's later life as opposed to the more materialist expectation of a Second Advent, which had earlier satisfied him. No doubt he received it by communication of his risen Lord. But that does not imply that it had no prototype in the world of existing religious belief. It had in fact a Pagan parallel or rudiment in the doctrine of the Orphic sects that life was an imprisonment in the body; and that death restored the soul to its natural communion with the gods. To this return to a divine source some of the Greeks even applied the word salvation. Whether St. Paul had ever heard of these views must remain uncertain, but they were the wild fruit grown on the same field of human nature wherein his noble and spiritual teaching was to find root. The doctrine then, whether or not in ultimate origin Greek, was imparted by the spirit of Christ, and made a part of the life of believers. As Christ lives in heaven, as the source of the Church's hidden life, so is the Christian to live in and with him, in some existence the nature of which is as yet hidden from us.

Not unlike the developed views of St. Paul are those of the author of the Fourth Gospel, who takes in this matter, as indeed in most theological questions, a view which is the extreme antithesis of that of the author of *Revelation*. And in this case, as in many others, the Fourth Evangelist, though he gives us no realistic portrait of his Master, yet portrays his spirit with no less truth than the less imaginative Synoptists. In the Fourth Gospel, the long eschatological discourses are altogether wanting. In the place of the coming of the

<sup>1</sup> This view of St. Paul's change of opinion is taken from Dr. Pfleiderer. The later view is found in *Phil.* i.

Messiah in the clouds of heaven, the Evangelist places a promise, simple and vague indeed as compared with those heart-stirring prophecies, yet destined to be the source of profound confidence in life and death to many Christians. "In my Father's house are many mansions." "I go to prepare a place for you." "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." The teaching of the Evangelist seems to be that whereas the Church on earth should be guided and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, Jesus himself should return to the glory of his Father, and there receive his followers to union with Christ and with God. Probably the Evangelist, like St. Paul, received with his mind the doctrine of the Second Advent; but it has passed into the background, and been overshadowed by the belief and earnest expectation of union with the exalted Son of God.

As the hope of a Second Advent gradually faded from the heart of the Church, the stately vision of the great white throne and the gathering of all mankind to a final doom also became dim. By slow and imperceptible degrees men abandoned the Jewish form of eschatological belief, and reverted to the Orphic and Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which has been, like so much of Platonic doctrine, adopted into Christianity, and has risen into a new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It remains for me briefly to indicate how far the changed intellectual conditions of our age have altered or invalidated the hope of the future life. This I do with the utmost diffidence; as it is a matter in which the masters of science should speak rather than historians. In the first place then, we must not allow our judgment to be turned aside by the obvious mixture of illusion in the ordinary beliefs as to death. It is quite in accord with what we have already observed as to the nature of illusion to hold that, though there is undoubtedly much of illusion in popular beliefs as to the future life, they may yet contain truth. Personal immortality and family reunions may be expectations in which dreams are mixed; and yet a man who has such expectations may be nearer to truth than one who regards death as the real end.

A great biologist, Weismann, has lately presented us with

an ingenious and apparently satisfactory argument to show that the duration of the life of living creatures is regulated by the necessities of the species. But neither this nor any other modern scientific theory throws any light upon the future life of man. This realm lies beyond the domain of outward science, so far as science has yet reached. But on the other hand the progress of psychology, and the study of the laws of thought, have certainly tended to encourage a belief in the future life, not so much by marking any outlines of that life, as by inculcating a growing disbelief in death. At the touch of the critical philosophy our ordinary edifice of simple objective knowledge loses its coherence and becomes spiritual. We discover that all knowledge is merely relative to certain faculties which we possess. And hence we very readily pass to the conclusion that enormous possibilities of knowledge and of life would lie open to us if those faculties were altered or enlarged. We pass our lives, as it were, in a single plane of existence, whereas an infinite number of other planes of existence may lie around us, and even penetrate us without our knowledge.<sup>1</sup> And corporeal things thus becoming ghostly to us, while will and character remain as the only real facts, it appears to us incongruous that at death the unreal should shatter the real, the merely apparent destroy that which has solid being. Rather we must anticipate that the death of the body, destroying our present avenues of knowledge, and shattering the *kosmos* with which we are acquainted, will only remove us into a new plane of being. To the materialist it may be easy to think of the soul dying with the body, but to the idealist it seems much more natural that the death of the body is for the personality associated with it only the ruin of the orderly frame of things which that personality has made for itself. And this brings us into view of infinite possibilities of experience, of growth, and of progress beyond the gates of death. It seems clear that at death space must vanish, or at all events be recognised as only a phase of some far more complicated condition. As to time the case is different: there does not appear any special reason why time

<sup>1</sup> In the book called *Flatland* this idea is worked out with considerable ingenuity.



should not partially condition a future life as it does the present. However, we have now reached a region of fancy and vague conjecture: our argument is trying to fly in an atmosphere too refined to resist the clumsy wing of reason; and we had best pause. We can only repeat that of all the things we know will and character are the most real, and therefore the most enduring; and to suppose that a clot of blood or a bullet can put an end to what is so immeasurably above them in the scale of the universe is a gratuitous and very improbable theory.

No doubt the future life thus suggested by the nature of thought and will may seem ghostly to one unused to metaphysics. And it may not satisfy the imperious longing for a continued life in all essentials like the present, which makes men and women dream eagerly of heaven and hell. It is only a canvas which we cannot paint, a possibility which thought cannot realise. Yet it rests upon the inmost facts of will and thought, personality and law; it is a hope of which no possible progress in science or discovery can hereafter deprive mankind. And having such a basis the doctrine of the future life can never be put out of court or set aside as unfounded.

To the vague outlines of the future life, as dimly discerned by philosophic thought from the time of Plato downwards, the specific doctrines of Christianity have given colour and definition. To two views as regards Jesus Christ correspond two kinds of anticipation of the future life.

(1) Those Christians who have accepted the physical resurrection of their Master have looked forward to rising like him in changed and purified bodies, to dwell thenceforth in his actual presence. (2) Those Christians who have had a strong realisation of communion with the exalted Christ have anticipated a personal and individual life after death, under changed conditions and in closer relations with their Master. The logical basis of their view seems to be this: character, as a result of subordinating the impulses of the self to the will of God partakes of the divine nature in proportion to the success in attaining such subordination. According to the view of the Founder which has been held in the Christian Church, in his case the subordination of all selfish impulse to

the divine will was complete. But this subordination was not merely a passive thing. It did not come from lying still and starving desire. This is a Buddhist rather than a Christian view. It came from actively working in union with the divine impulses. And the result of such working was the formation of a character which was divine also, and which belongs to a higher sphere than that of sense and of time. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Thus the doctrine of the Living Christ seems to be closely bound up with that of the future personal existence of Christians. "Because I live, ye shall live also." And this view is with many one of the corner-stones of religion, and even of morality. The doctrine of a personal immortality was regarded by Tennyson as the root-doctrine of his creed. There are, on the other hand, many excellent Christians to whom the experience of life has brought precisely the opposite longing, the desire to be rid of the narrow and egotistic self, and to sink into a broader, a higher, and a more impersonal life.

Thus at bottom the Christian hope of immortality is based upon experience, experience variously interpreted according to intellectual bias and the history of the life. Thus eminent Christians of past days, saints and heroes and martyrs, have carried into the prospect of death the spirit taught them by the experience of life. Having been used day by day to seek for heavenly aid by prayer, they have learned by experience that this aid does not fail them. A long course of trust in divine Providence has fully convinced them that divine aid is given when sought, and always sufficient for the need. Trust in God has been justified by the facts of life so completely that it has been easy to trust God also in death. And Christians who have lived like St. Paul in communion with the exalted Christ, have been convinced that death is no more able than any other divine ordinance to separate the member from his divine Head.

And a comparison with other phases of human life will show that it is precisely habit rooted in experience which readily overcomes the fear of death. The high-minded soldier who is filled with the habit of military discipline is convinced that it is better for him to run the risk of death than to do what is mean or disgraceful, and he meets death day by day in

the trenches, and looks it in the face with calm determination. The physician goes down amid a virulent infection, which will probably be fatal to him, simply because he cannot without violence to his acquired nature turn his back on the claims of the sick and suffering. Each of these feels, though often in a rudimentary and half-conscious way, that the path of duty is really that which leads to good, and that cowardice will infallibly lead to evil and misery.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### BAPTISM

SOME of the external ordinances of the Church, more especially Baptism and the Lord's Supper, have from the first been so closely intertwined with doctrine as to be inseparable from it. These also we must consider, as we have considered the main doctrines of Christianity, from the historic side. A rite is, like a doctrine, the expression of an idea. And rites, like doctrines, are justified rather by results than on speculative grounds: yet their history is often illuminating.

It is not possible to treat here in detail the history of baptism. Already in speaking of purification<sup>1</sup> we have dealt with the principle which it embodies. Purifications by means of water were as well known in Pagan cultus as the more sacrificial cleansings by the blood of a victim. Sprinkling by water was part of the preparation by which men made themselves fit to approach the gods with prayer and offering. And on the more solemn occasions of Greek religion a more formal cleansing took place. Those who were admitted as mystæ to the sacred rites at Eleusis had to undergo a previous cleansing in the sea or salt lakes; in the worship of Cybele and other half-Greek deities, baptism had a place; and the priests of the Thracian Cotytto perhaps took their name of Baptæ from such a ceremony. Among the Jews, the Pharisees rigidly adhered to the custom of washing the hands before partaking of food, and the Essenes carried the custom of bathing for ceremonial cleanness still further. Proselytes

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XXV.

to Judaism were baptized, but not Jews born into the faith.

The custom of baptism seems to have come into the Christian Church directly from John the Baptist; whence he derived it is more doubtful, but there were abundant precedents all round.<sup>1</sup> With him it was a ceremony of confession of sin, and of purification from it; and as such a ceremony it doubtless entered upon its Christian phase, though the meaning attached to it soon widened and deepened. We are told in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus did not himself baptize, but that his first disciples did so on a large scale. But the silence of the Synoptists as to baptism renders it doubtful whether the rite was practised by the Christian society before the death of the Founder. How it came into the society we are not sure. What is certain is that, soon after that death, converts were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. The exhortation put by our histories in the mouth of Ananias,<sup>2</sup> "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord," may not be strictly historical, but it probably embodies the views of the early disciples.

Thus the Christian element which was added to the Jewish and Pagan rite was the name into which disciples were baptized. In the *Acts* this name is that of "the Lord" or of "Jesus Christ." For example, St. Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, is reported to have said,<sup>3</sup> "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." And the same Apostle, on the occasion of his visit to Cornelius,<sup>4</sup> "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." It has been maintained by some commentators that although the name of Christ only is here mentioned, we may suppose that the usual Trinitarian formula of baptism is intended. This explanation is indefensible, being quite inconsistent with the most authentic records of early Christianity, the Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans and the Corinthians. "So many of us," he says, "as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death,"<sup>5</sup> and again,

<sup>1</sup> Renan regards Mesopotamia as the source of the rite, *Les Évangiles*, p. 454.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts* xxii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* ii. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* x. 48; cf. viii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Rom.* vi. 3.



"Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?"<sup>1</sup> in which passage it is implied that the converts were baptized into the name of him who was crucified. And with this testimony the statements in the *Acts*, a far less trustworthy authority, are quite accordant. Thus there can be no question that the earliest Christian baptism was into the name of Jesus Christ; and that the last verses of Matthew's Gospel, prescribing baptism into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not embody the teaching of the Master, or even of his Apostles, at the first.

At an early stage, however, in the history of the Church, the custom was introduced of baptizing into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;<sup>2</sup> and according to the manner of the age, a definite authority for the formula was produced by the prevalence of a tale that the Founder had himself ordered that it should be employed: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Some commentators suppose that those words are authentic, little as they are in the manner of Jesus. But it seems quite impossible that the custom of baptizing into the name of Christ only could have persisted among the early disciples, if the Master himself had, as a last solemn injunction, prescribed a different baptismal formula. Moreover, it is to be observed that the words ascribed to Jesus in the same verse of the First Gospel, "teach all nations," must have originated after the Church had realised her destiny to spread beyond the bounds of the Jewish race, a view which, after the Master's death, slowly made way, mainly, no doubt, owing to the influence of St. Paul, and in opposition to the strong feelings of some of the original Apostles.

It is interesting to observe that the roots of the belief in the supernatural efficacy of baptism were entwined with a notion which the orthodox Church afterwards regarded as heretical. I have already (Chap. XIX) quoted a passage from Dr. Harnack, in which he expresses the opinion that the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 13.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Didaché* baptism into the three names is mentioned, but not infant baptism. Cruttwell, *Literary History*, i. 66.

earliest teaching of the Church did not include the virgin-birth, but did include the baptism by John, and the descent of the Spirit on Jesus on that occasion. The second of these is an attempt to explain the divinity of Jesus Christ, as is the first; and the two explanations are really alternative. If Jesus was the Son of God from his mother's womb, it does not seem easy to explain a subsequent descent of the Spirit on him, thenceforth to abide with him. In Mark the "Gospel of Jesus Christ" begins with the baptism. The narrative of the Fourth Evangelist is even more explicit, "John bare witness, saying, I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it abode upon him." The words "it abode upon him" (*ἐμεινεν ἐπ' αὐτόν*) seem to imply that in the writer's view this was the beginning of the divine life in Jesus. In fact, if one reads carefully the whole of the chapter this view is forced on one. Jesus Christ was the light to which John was to bear witness, and the whole purpose of John's ministry was to give occasion for the shining of the light. Apocryphal gospels speak of a physical light as shining over Jordan at the baptism: the Fourth Evangelist avoids that piece of materialism; but it is quite clear how highly he rates the results of the baptism. In the Ebionite form of gospel we go a step farther:<sup>1</sup> the dove descends and *enters into* Jesus, and a voice is heard saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; this day have I begotten thee." Clement of Alexandria<sup>2</sup> accepted this version of the divine voice; and says that Jesus, though already the Logos born of the Father, yet became perfect in baptism, and hallowed by the descent of the dove.

Clement tries to combine the Luean and the Johannine views of the birth of Christ: the former of these by degrees gained a more general vogue; but the latter was in some church circles made a key-stone of a fabric of doctrine. Several sects have given the greatest prominence to the view that by baptism the natural man Jesus was transformed into the adopted Son of God, as an alternative view to that of the supernatural birth. It naturally caused all those who received

<sup>1</sup> Epiphanius, *Har.* xxx. 13. Compare a paper by Mr. F. C. Conybeare in the *American Journal of Theology*, iii. 1; and H. Usener, *Religionsgesch. Untersuchungen*.

<sup>2</sup> *Pedagogus*, i. 6.

it to attach a very high value to baptism, which was to the believer, as to his Master, a reception of the divine Spirit and an entry into a new life. Hence a thaumaturgic power was attributed to the mere rite even more readily in the eddies than in the main stream of Christian development.

St. Paul's view of baptism is distinctive. He speaks of burial with Christ in baptism, and of being baptized into the death of Christ,<sup>1</sup> and of rising with him from the dead. One would naturally expect him to say one of two things, either that the Christian was crucified with Christ and rose again, or else that he was baptized with Christ into a new life: but he combines the two phrases in the manner of a great original thinker. In his own way, he transforms the rite of baptism, not into a thaumaturgic process, but into a spiritual experience of a mystic intensity. To him baptism does not merely mean repentance for sin, and attempt at a purified life; it was burial with Christ and rising again with him; it was incorporation into the earthly body of Christ, and becoming a new creature. There can be little doubt that in this matter, as in others, Paul innovates by grafting upon a Jewish rite a deeper meaning, of which the germs lay in the Pagan Mysteries. Harnack has observed that two of the terms applied to baptism in the early Church, sealing and illumination,<sup>2</sup> are terms used in the Mysteries, having reference to that salvation which it was the purpose of the Mysteries to confer upon those who partook of them. It was the mission of Paul in this, as in other matters, by grasping the loftier religious ideas, which had been partially and imperfectly recognised in the Mysteries of Paganism, to turn the heart of the Christian Church from Christ according to the flesh to Christ after the spirit. And however much the pure spirituality of his teaching was afterwards mixed with the lower elements, which were perhaps necessary to fit it for human conditions, yet the Apostle remains the great founder of Christian doctrine.

Thus in some Christian circles baptism, of course adult baptism, tended to become the central rite of Christianity, the

<sup>1</sup> *Rom.* vi. 4: cf. *Coloss.* ii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *σφραγίς* and *φωτισμός*. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. i. 207; cf. Wobbermin, *Das antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 144.

occasion of a perpetual moral miracle. In the victorious or orthodox Church it took another line of development. The baptism of infants, admitted by degrees, became more and more general. It seems that the earliest evidence of the practice of infant baptism is found in Irenæus: it rapidly spread in the course of the second and third centuries, in spite of the earnest opposition of some of the leaders of the Church.<sup>1</sup> The benefit of baptism had arisen from the co-operation of the divine Spirit with the will of those who were baptized. But the essential human element being overlooked, it came to be thought that the grace of God would act without the corresponding movement of the human will, and that the Church could, by her ordinances, impart it to whom she would. The natural consequence of this supposition would be that parents would be eager to procure baptism for children in danger of dying; and it may be that from this beginning infant baptism spread generally. And as a consequence of pædo-baptism, since infants could not themselves renounce their evil life and promise to follow Christ, it was necessary to introduce sponsors who should make engagements on their behalf, who should undertake their share of what came to be regarded as a sort of contract with God, guaranteeing the salvation of man.

We shall the less wonder at this change in baptism if we consider that at a decidedly earlier time the same drift of feeling which gave rise to it had originated another remarkable custom, that of baptism on behalf of those who were dead. It is extraordinary that even the spiritual genius of St. Paul did not preserve him from accepting this custom; nay, more, he even bases on it an argument for the resurrection.

In such changes the modern student is apt to see only error and decline. And there can be no doubt that they sprang in great degree at least from false views of fact, from wrong theories of the human will and the divine action in the world. But in history we constantly see good growing out of evil, and higher truth emerging from falsehood which has strangled a lower truth. The place of baptism as the gate of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Anrich (*Das antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 175) is disposed to connect infant baptism with the Greek custom of amphidromia, the introduction of an infant to the family hearth.

Christian life was gradually taken by the ordinance of confirmation, and the Holy Communion following it, which answered the same purpose, and a new career in the Church was opened to baptism. To the tenacity of it in this new sphere perhaps the strongest testimony is offered by the fact that among those dissenting bodies which profess strictly to follow the authority of Scripture, only a small minority conform to it by adult baptism, and the great majority adhere to infant baptism.

When conversion to Christianity ceased to be an individual thing, and Christians became an hereditary class in the Roman Empire, it seems to have been felt that the children of Christian parents should not stand towards the Church in the same external relation as the children of Jews or Heathen. The child is not a mere isolated phenomenon, but carries on the life of his parents. And when the life of the parents has been life in Christ, the child is, as it were, born into Christ.

But whatever may have been, in the history of the Christian Church, the value of the institution of infant baptism, that institution became largely mixed with materialism and with superstition. A large part of the Church still maintains that there is in the mere fact of baptism some external sacramental efficacy; that a child who is baptized is thereby changed by a miraculous interposition of divine power and made regenerate. Such a belief can, however, scarcely find a foothold amid the changed state of our intellectual surroundings. Experience does not seem to favour it. And it can obviously have no scriptural authority, since infant baptism is not mentioned in Scripture.

A place as prominent as that of baptism is taken in the *Acts* by the rite of the laying on of hands. This rite is well known to readers of the Jewish Scriptures. Moses laid his hands on Joshua to constitute him his successor; and by the laying on of the hands of the priest the sins of Israel were transferred to the scape-goat that was sent out into the wilderness. But, of course, the rite was not confined to Israel; it is part of the natural and instinctive action of man. And the facts of morbid psychology and hypnotism sufficiently prove that there is great efficacy for many purposes in the



contact of the human hand. Jesus is said to have wrought many of his cures by laying his hands on those who were sick. And the first disciples, with or without direction from their Master, adopted the Jewish belief that he who had the Spirit could impart it to others by the laying on of hands.<sup>1</sup> This belief, like the practice of baptism, they consecrated to Christ, and brought into the service of the early Church.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Anrich, *Das antike Mysterienwesen*, p. 117.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE COMMUNION

THE doctrine of the Christian Communion occupies as sacred a place in Catholic Christianity as does the doctrine of the Atonement among the Evangelical churches, and it is with no less caution and moderation that it should be approached. But it is possible to consider it without presumption when one treats it from the definitely historic point of view. The true and ultimate foundation of the doctrine of the Communion is, as we shall observe later, the experience in the Church of the efficacy of the practice of the Communion. But the inquiry into the origin and early history of the custom is a purely historic matter: at least historic science will not and cannot be warned off the ground in these days. And such historic inquiries cannot prove or disprove directly anything in regard to actual experience of existing fact.

The great mass of Christians no doubt take the accounts of the foundation of the Communion at the last supper of Jesus on earth, as they are given in the English text of the Synoptic Gospels, for a literal narrative of facts. In the same way those unused to philosophic inquiry find no difficulty in understanding the ultimate nature of matter. In both cases reflection and study show that what seems very simple and straightforward is really by no means such. The simple-minded Christian may naturally say that he is unfitted for critical historic study; and the statement is very reasonable: only, if he allows that he is not a good judge of historic evidence, then he must not base his belief upon such evidence,

but rather on spiritual experience, of which he may be an excellent judge.

If we begin with comparing the Synoptic account of the Last Supper with the Johannine, our difficulties will at once arise. The discourse at the Synoptic meal is as to the body and blood of the Master; at the Johannine meal it is as to the washing of feet, and the question who should be the traitor. But that is not all; it may be said, Why should not all this talk have taken place, and one evangelist have recorded some part of it and another another part? The answer is that the Synoptic meal is clearly the Jewish Paschal feast, while the Johannine meal is no such thing, but an ordinary supper before the Passover.

Next we may observe that the Johannine account, which bears internal marks of resting on some good authority, does indeed connect the Last Supper with a Christian ordinance; but it is the ordinance of washing feet, not of a common repast. When it was written, we know on the testimony of St. Paul's Epistles that the Communion was in common use at least in many of the churches, yet the Evangelist does not give any countenance to the view that it was founded by the Master on the eve of his departure. In several of the discourses which he attributes to Jesus the doctrines afterwards grouped about the Communion are mentioned, but they are detached, as if of set purpose, from any special rite. Thus in one place we have the parable of the vine and its branches, which naturally connects itself with the use of wine in the Communion. But the early Christians sometimes used water rather than wine at the rite, and with this use we may compare the passage in the Johannine Gospel as to the living water which shall be in a man as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. Even closer to the Christian Communion is that remarkable passage in *John* vi., beginning "I am the bread of life." It is natural to think that all this is intentional, and that the writer of the Fourth Gospel was doubtful as to the expediency of rooting in the Church an outward observance such as the Communion. One of the least materialist of all religious teachers, though not always consistently so, he was anxious to keep alive the full spiritual

meaning of every word of his Master. "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." With even greater fervour would this great writer have urged such views upon the disciples, had he foreseen the gross materialism which was destined to rule in the Church in future ages.

Next, if we compare the account in Luke with St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 *Cor.* xi. 23), we observe that Paul describes the scene of the Last Supper in almost the words used by the Evangelist; but he also tells us that he received the knowledge not from the disciples, but "from the Lord"; that is, by a direct revelation to himself. These are sufficient historic difficulties to start with; and they make us feel like travellers who, when expecting easily to reach the crest of a mountain, should suddenly find a series of deep ravines breaking the road.

It is noteworthy that in the account of the Last Supper as given in the Synoptic Gospels there is no direction as to the institution of a recurring rite in memory of that supper. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," occur in our text of the Third Gospel, but they are apparently an interpolation,<sup>1</sup> or if not an interpolation, taken directly from St. Paul. The phrase, "breaking of bread," used in the *Acts* for the Christian common meal, is an expression used in various passages of the Old Testament, and well understood by the Jews. We may cite *Isaiah* lviii. 7, where the best authorities read, "Is it not to break thy bread to the hungry?" The words "breaking bread," then, imply no more than a common meal, such as was usual among the first Christians, and certainly do not imply a sacrament. And the breaking of bread from house to house was part of the partial community of goods in the Church: whichever disciple had the means and the time provided a meal. The clear fact then is, that there is no direct evidence that Jesus, when alive, founded any communion of eating and drinking.

Even supposing that the Founder of Christianity did intend

<sup>1</sup> So Westcott and Hort, *Select Readings*, p. 64. "These difficulties" . . . "leave no moral doubt that the words in question were absent from the original text of Luke."

to perpetuate among his disciples some memorial of his last supper with them, the question would still remain what kind of rite he meant to establish. Was it a special manner of celebrating the Paschal feast, of which of course all the disciples, as good Jews, partook every year? Was it the ordinary meal of every day that the Apostles were to consecrate by a memory of their Master? Some of the phrases in the Evangelists certainly seem to give colour to this latter view. But taking our narratives as they stand, it is scarcely possible to read them as directing the establishment of some new and purely Christian rite. Nor is there any evidence of any such rite in the Church until we come to St. Paul.

In the *First Corinthian Epistle* (xi. 24) this Apostle speaks of the Lord's Supper as a solemn rite introduced by himself into the Church of Corinth. Whence then did he derive it? His phrase is, "I received it from the Lord"; and, although commentators are divided as to the precise import of the phrase, it is far most natural to take it, with Chrysostom, Calvin, Estius, Bengel, Osiander, Olshausen, Alford, Evans, Edwards, and a host of other writers, as implying an immediate communication made by his risen Lord to the Apostle himself. If this be the true interpretation, it must be allowed that, setting aside the question how much St. Paul knew of the historic facts of the Last Supper, the command to observe a rite in memory of it comes not, so far as our actual evidence goes, from the historic Jesus, but from Paul, speaking in the name of his Master.

This very simple recital of facts will show on how slight and conflicting evidence is based the commonly-received view that the Lord's Supper was instituted by the Founder of our religion, on the night before he suffered, and was constantly thereafter celebrated by his disciples. Dr. Hort has entirely removed the basis of that view when he rejects as an interpolation in Luke the words, "This do in remembrance of me." These historic difficulties induced me, in 1893, to publish a short paper, in which I discussed them, and suggested for the consideration of scholars some novel views. That pamphlet was intended mainly to call attention to a difficult problem; and in this purpose it was successful. But some of the



theories which I then brought forward no longer satisfy me. I insisted on the personal character of the revelation to St. Paul of the Lord's Supper; and rightly: but the notion that Paul when at Corinth may have taken a suggestion of the sacred meal from the rites carried on at the neighbouring Eleusis now seems to me untenable. It would require very strong evidence to make us believe that Paul, with all his Catholicity, would accept a hint derived from such a source.

The historic view of the origin of the Lord's Supper which I now prefer is suggested by a luminous observation of Prof. Weizsäcker.<sup>1</sup> He observes that in the common life of the society Jesus, when alive, presided at meals, and broke the bread. His manner of doing so was peculiar to himself; since he was said to have been recognised by it after his resurrection. "When, therefore, his followers continued these common meals, they involved, even apart from the memorial celebration instituted by him at the last, the perpetual renewal both of their relations to him and of the union constituted by him. The meal itself was therefore a religious act. It became a thank-offering, and a type and evidence of the kingdom of God existent among them, and ruling and transforming their whole natural and social life."

I would go rather further than Dr. Weizsäcker, and say that when the disciples met at the common meal after the Crucifixion, being full of the consciousness of the presence of their Master in the spirit, they could scarcely fail to think of him as still presiding. Such banquets with unseen guests were among the commonest of the phenomena of Greek and Oriental religion, more especially in connection with the cultus of those who had departed out of life. It was exceedingly natural that in this way every common meal should become a banquet of communion with the risen Lord.

But what in that case can be the meaning of Paul when he claims the Lord's Supper as specially revealed to himself? We may perhaps venture to take his phrases with a little latitude. What he meant to deny was the reception of the

<sup>1</sup> *Das Apostol. Zeitalter*, p. 43: Trans. p. 52. Dr. Weizsäcker does, however, regard the account given by the Synoptists of the Last Supper as historical (Trans. ii. 279). His discussion of this matter is less thoroughgoing than usual.

rite from the Apostles, as if he were in any way under their sway. It was a revelation to himself which induced him to import into the Church at Corinth a custom prevalent at Jerusalem. And what he established at Corinth was not in fact the same rite as that of Jerusalem, but a rite on the higher mystic level. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," seem to be the burden of the revelation to Paul; but whence the more detailed description of the Supper came we must remain in doubt. It is perhaps scarcely fair to press his words in their literal meaning, and to suppose that the facts of the Last Supper as he repeats them were a vision revealed to himself, but afterwards generally accepted in the Church as historic. Unless theologians are prepared to accept this somewhat extreme view, they must suppose that there was current among Christians, and known to Paul, a tradition of a historic last supper, such as the Synoptists describe; and that Paul claims, as the result of a direct revelation only, the adaptation of the rite and its introduction into the Church of Corinth.

Whatever may have been the historic occasion of the first introduction of the institution, it seems clear that its character was by St. Paul brought into harmony with his mystical doctrines of baptism, of the Church, and of the exalted Christ. As the Christian Sacrament was received first in the Pauline churches and then generally, it belongs to the Pauline circle of ideas, and St. Paul, if not the actual introducer of the rite, was the author of its mystical and sacramental character, as showing the Lord's death and imparting communion with his life. To make this clear, we must briefly resume the pre-Christian history of the Christian Communion.

Of the three ideas embodied in ancient sacrifice of which we have spoken in Chapter XXIX, the first, that of mere donation to the gods, has its modern development in almsgiving and in self-sacrifice. The second idea, that of atonement, has, as we have seen in Chapter XXXI, been still more specifically introduced into Christianity. The third, that of a common life between worshipper and worshipped, belongs to the present connection. Sacrifices of communion belong to the most sacred stratum of the religion of many barbarous tribes. Their cultus centres in the periodical festival at which

some victim, which is regarded as embodying the common life of the community, is slain and eaten in common, to renew the life of the tribe.<sup>1</sup> Among tribes at a higher level of civilisation these beliefs have lived on, but in modified form. In the Dionysiac and Mithraic Mysteries of Greece they were overlaid with symbolism rather than altered in essence. But in the more public and less mysterious cults of Greece, the sacrifice took rather the form of a meal, wherein the deity and the worshippers renewed their relations by means of a solemn common meal. This feasting in common was not reserved for the festivals held in honour of the dead, though in these it was especially well established, but also was practised at many of the great public services of Greece, at which food was spread for the gods, and they came to enjoy the hospitality of the cities which they honoured with their protection, at the so-called *Theoxenia* or *Lectisternia*.

The primitive communion sacrifice also survived among the Jews in the form of the Paschal feast, many of the rites of which can only be explained, as Mr. Frazer has well shown, by supposing it in origin a harvest and communion feast. The account which we possess of the origin of the rite must be regarded as having arisen later. It would seem, however, that the influence of the Paschal feast on the Christian rite was not direct. It was necessary to revert from it to an earlier point in the main stem of sacrificial belief, and thus Pagan Mystery had closer analogy than Jewish rite.

Any one who compares the Pauline account of the Last Supper with the procedure at the Paschal feast, as set forth in any work on Jewish or Biblical antiquities, will observe that there is hardly any correspondence between the two. The Paschal meal was marked by the eating of a lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, and the drinking of four successive cups of wine. At the Pauline Sacrament only bread, apparently of the ordinary kind, and one cup of wine are mentioned. It would seem far more probable that its immediate origin should be sought in Jewish common meals of an ordinary kind, than in the Paschal celebration.

This line of observation is strengthened by a comparison

On this subject see several chapters of Mr. Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

of the *Didaché*. The eucharistic formulæ there detailed (ch. ix. 10) are very curious. In them there is nothing of the Pauline view, no allusion to the sacrifice of the cross, but thanks for the holy vine of David, and for life and knowledge through Jesus, and a prayer that the Church may be gathered together from the ends of the earth into the heavenly kingdom. It is impossible in the present place to discuss these formulæ with the attention which they deserve, but they have every appearance of being Jewish in origin, modified by adoption into Christianity. There is a probability that the rite described in the *Didaché* contains elements which belong to the synagogues of the Jewish Diaspora, like so much else that was absorbed into early Christianity. Or it may be a direct descendant of the common meal of the Church at Jerusalem, unmodified by Pauline ideas.

It seems reasonable to incline to see in the Christian Sacrament as accepted by the Church an early Christian custom of the common meal mixed with an infusion of sacrificial mysticism, probably due to Paul. I now prefer this view to one I have elsewhere suggested, that it was the ritual of Eleusis which suggested to Paul, when staying at the neighbouring Corinth, the idea of a Christian Communion. Direct imitation of any heathen rite by a Christian teacher is improbable; far more probable is the working of an idea in parallel lines on Pagan societies and on Christianity. Out of a mere ordinary meal, by making it the embodiment of some of the most ancient and most profound of religious ideas, there grew a backbone for the framework of Christianity, a continued means of communion between the exalted Master and his followers on earth.

If the historic doubts which lie around the origin of the great Christian rite are scarcely to be dissipated, it is all the more necessary and the more legitimate to appeal from the origin of the institution to its continued history in the Church. Here, at all events, we are on safe ground. The evidence of Christian experience is clear enough.

The doctrine of the Communion, however it may have been mixed with foreign accretions, or sometimes rendered materialist by unworthy developments, is yet doubtless in the

last resort built upon a basis of fact. One of the writers in *Lux Mundi*<sup>1</sup> expresses this in a brief but sufficient way, "He has prepared for us a way which leads from strength to strength; and we know where He is ready to meet us, and to replenish us with life and light. There is a glory which shall be revealed in us; and here on earth we may so draw near and take it to ourselves that its quiet incoming tide may more and more pervade our being; with radiance ever steadier and more transforming . . . not by vague waves of feeling, or by moments of experience which admit no certain measure, no unvarying test, no objective verification, but by an actual change, a cleansing and renewal of our manhood, a transformation which we can mark in human lives and human faces, or trace in that strange trait of saintliness which Christianity has wrought into the rough fabric of human history, may the reality of Sacramental grace be known on earth."

There can be no question of the enormous value of the practice in the Christian Church. Christian prayer may be the highest form of prayer, but the essential nature of prayer is the same in all countries. But the Christian Communion stands apart as belonging wholly to Christianity. And modern researches into religious psychology have shown that the centre of gravity of religion in most ages lies rather in practice and habit than in thought or belief. Thus the Communion appeals to the faculties with an incredible force, derived from the religious awe and aspirations not only of our Christian ancestors, but of hundreds of generations of barbarians who lived before the Christian era. It brings satisfaction not only to the conscious surface of our minds, but to feelings of which we are but half conscious or wholly unconscious. It has a hold on the deepest and most human roots of our nature. Possibly there may be some to whom the suggestion of a connection between the Christian Communion and early views of sacrifice may seem derogatory to the former. This way of regarding the matter is quite unjustified. To any thoughtful man, and especially to any believer in evolution, the long descent and the noble history of the Communion of Sacrifice, before its conversion to Christianity, must needs make it appear far

<sup>1</sup> 1st edit. p. 433. The writer is Dr. Paget.



more august and far more valid than could have been before, now supposed by any of the Protestant schools of religious thought. At the same time we receive a warning against a too materialist view of the Communion, when we see that it has behind it whole millennia of gradually growing spiritualisation. The beliefs attaching to the rite among the uneducated of the south of Europe are a survival not merely from Paganism, but from a stage of religious development which lies earlier than polytheism.

But is it feasible to transfer the binding authority of the Lord's Supper from a ground of history to one of experience? No doubt this is a serious and a difficult question, which it is perhaps somewhat bold to discuss at all, and which at any rate one must discuss with great diffidence. No doubt many English Christians regard the Communion as sacred only because they conceive it to have the direct authority of the Founder when on earth. They stake their whole faith on the correctness of certain historical views. Much as we may sympathise with and respect this school of Christians, we cannot but feel that they hold an untenable position, and that every year and every day the rising waters of historic doubt are undermining the ledge on which they dwell in the houses of their ancestors. The final catastrophe can scarcely be distant. In our days religion must be built on fact and experience, not on mere written record, or on testimony which cannot be tested.

If the modern Christian is content to base his religious belief and practice on experience, whether his own or that of others whom he trusts, then he occupies a position which can scarcely be assailed. If he bases them on an ideal reconstruction of history, he is on ground far less safe, for at any time new facts may come to light which render his view untenable. Yet so long as such facts do not appear, he may retain his footing. But if he claim to base his doctrine and practice upon the actual fact of history, then he boldly challenges the spirit of historic scepticism, and must consent to be tried before the tribunal of historic science. And in these days of scepticism he will run the greatest risk of overthrow. He builds not on the rock, but on

the sandy shore of a stream, the waters of which are hourly rising.

There is another fact which persons of this way of thinking must consider. Though there is no proof that Jesus intended to institute a Lord's Supper, there is another rite for which we have definite evangelical evidence. The Fourth Evangelist tells how, when just about to suffer, Jesus with careful solemnity washed the feet of his Apostles. And having done so, he took his garments and sat down again and began to enforce the lesson inherent in his action, enjoining them in similar manner to wash one another's feet. Definitely and deliberately, if we can trust our narrative, he established a rite. Of course the Christian Church could not entirely neglect this ordinance; yet how different has been its history from the history of the Communion. The reason of this difference lies not in the words or actions of the Founder of Christianity, but in the circumstance that the washing of feet did not become attached to any of the great historic lines of religious doctrine, while the Communion did become so attached. In evolutionary language we may say that the Communion, whensoever it first became a part of Christian cultus, and whosoever was its first institutor, was the work of the Divine Spirit creating forms suitable to the life of the future, preparing organs for functions yet to be developed. Like almost all customs and institutions, the Communion gradually grew to the fulness of the meaning attached to it by the later Church. Perhaps some of the aftergrowth savours of superstition, perhaps of materialism. The various schools of Christian thought must attach to the rite such meaning as suits their best thought and highest inspiration.

The natural enemy of all working hypotheses, which are necessarily relative, is the old absolute spirit which still rules in so many spheres, and which will maintain that unless the Sacrament was established by the divine Founder of Christianity while on earth, it must needs be a superstitious rite, of no efficacy, but rather misleading the souls of men. Arbitrary and presumptuous as is this view, and distinctly contrary to our experience of the world, it is to be feared that it would commend itself to many, whether Catholics or Protestants.

Only the gradual spread of science and of the comparative method can gradually wean men's minds from such views.

There is a phrase, popular with some of the Broad Church School, which will well serve to define our position in the matter, the phrase "the higher third." First we have the absolute assertion that the Communion was ordained and laid upon men by the direct authority of the living Author of Christianity, and is therefore divine and effectual. Secondly we have the absolute negation: it cannot be proved that the Communion was so instituted; therefore it is neither divine nor effectual. Thirdly we have the relative affirmation: the Communion is certainly effectual and therefore divine, at least to the greater part of professing Christians; but its origin is a matter which cannot be settled by experience nor by mere reasoning, but which must be investigated by historical research.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

WHEN, in the sixteenth century, the Teutonic nations decisively rejected the authority of the Roman Church, their appeal was to another authority, that of Holy Scripture. They believed generally that the Bible was directly inspired by the Spirit of God, and used it as a touchstone for detecting the false doctrines of Rome. But the doctrine of the direct inspiration, the infallibility of Scripture, was no new teaching, rather one which had its roots in a very remote past. Its ultimate source is certainly Jewish; it is one of the legacies handed on by Jewish rabbis to Christian teachers. Among the Jews of the early Christian age, the belief in the verbal and literal infallibility of their sacred books had reached a pitch of superstition which is almost incredible. Every sentence and word and letter was regarded as directly dictated by God. And so great was the fear of introducing some small alteration in transcribing the sacred books, that manuscripts of any of them were collated and recollated and sold at enormous prices, many-fold of what would be paid for Greek manuscripts of the same length. And Jehovah himself was represented by the Scribes as spending nights and days in reading and studying the Scriptures. Veneration for the Jewish Scriptures passed at the first into the system of early Christianity, and there exercised great influence.

It is by no means easy to determine the attitude taken up by the Founder of Christianity towards Scripture. In the narrative of the Temptation he is represented as repelling

every suggestion of Satan by some maxim quoted from it. And very strong expressions of veneration for the text of the law are placed in the mouth of the Founder by the Synoptic writers. For example we read, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." It is very difficult to reconcile such extreme expressions as these with the great freedom with which, in other places, Jesus amends or supersedes the commandments of the law, or with such other statements as "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." In view of this, some able commentators have thought that the class of passages first cited must derive not from the Founder, but from some prominent member of the Church at Jerusalem. They have thought it impossible that Jesus should have spoken in such terms of veneration of a law which he in many points wished to supersede. It seems clear that Jesus distinguished between the spirit and the letter of the law, regarding the former as eternal and divine, the latter as liable to supersession. Even the admission of this distinction does not, however, completely solve our difficulty; for in some matters, notably as regards the law of marriage and divorce, it is not only the letter of the Jewish law, but its spirit also, which the Founder sets himself to dispute. It therefore seems that, unless we are to suppose some inconsistency in the Master's teaching, we must regard the reports of his expression of veneration for the law as exaggerated in transmission.

The close clinging to Scripture on the part of the writers of the earliest Christian books is obvious to the reader. Alike the Synoptists and St. Paul think the citation of scriptural passages better proof of doctrine, or even of historic fact, than either reason or testimony. We have already seen how whole passages in *Matthew* are put together out of prophecies regarded as Messianic. The speeches in the *Acts*, that of Peter on the day of Pentecost, that of Philip to the Ethiopian in his chariot, that of Stephen before his judges, are all based upon citation,



not of evidence, but of passages of Scripture. Even in the doctrinal discussions in *Romans* and *Galatians*, we find the stones of the fabric to be texts of Scripture, while the arguments of the writer are but as the cement which holds them together. But of course in the case of so great and original a thinker as Paul there is no slavery or subservience to the sacred text, rather a free and genial use of it for high purpose. And although Paul is overflowing with veneration for Scripture he allows himself to speak of the Mosaic law as of something which had passed into the background compared with the rising life of the Christian society. The *Apology* of Justin is a good example to show how extreme veneration for Scripture lasted in full force into the second century; and in fact it has always persisted.

The Jews, who had been scattered in the days after Alexander over all the cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, had carried with them everywhere as their most cherished possession their sacred writings. In the reading and exposition of these the whole service of the synagogues centred. Their influence kept Israel uncontaminated, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And this immense advantage the Christian Church received undiminished from the Jews. Harnack writes,<sup>1</sup> "Whatever source of comfort and strength Christianity, even in its New Testament, has possessed, or does possess up to the present, is for the most part taken from the Old Testament, viewed from a Christian standpoint, in virtue of the impression of the person of Jesus." "Out of this treasure, which was handed down to the Greeks and Romans, the Church edified herself, and in the perception of its riches was largely rooted the conviction that the holy book must in every line contain the highest truth."

It was a slow and gradual process whereby the immense reverence felt in the Church for the Scriptures of the Old Testament was extended also to the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. The orthodox Church differed from the Gnostics in that she retained full veneration for the Jewish Scriptures, which the Gnostics would have placed at a lower level or even rejected. But of course it was inevitable that with time the New Testa-

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, trans. i. 42, cf. 177.

ment should become a more valued possession of Christendom than the Old. The modern world necessarily reverses the process of the early Church. It is of the New Testament primarily that those who still cling to the doctrine of Biblical infallibility are thinking, and the Old Testament shines with a lustre which is mainly reflected from it.

The formation of a canon of New Testament scripture was in the main a work of the second century. The principal object of such a canon was to check the aberrations of abnormal enthusiasm. As always happens when a wave of religious inspiration is subsiding, strange and wild heresies were making themselves felt in the Church. The members of the Church in the first century had been so full of the presence of their Master, so overflowing with the gifts of the Spirit, that the written word was of less import to them. But later a test and a check for the outpourings of personal inspiration became necessary. Professedly it was formed by making a book of the genuine apostolic writings. But in practice something different took place. Mark and Luke were not Apostles, and the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is anonymous; while, on the other hand, several books bearing the name of Apostles were excluded from the canon. For early Christians the question of the genuineness and authenticity of various books read in the churches was inextricably mixed up with the question of the tendencies of those books. What did not tend to edification could not be apostolic; and, on the other hand, nothing was easier than to attribute to an Apostle a work of undoubted inspiration. Thus, partly on evidence of tradition, and partly by a process of natural selection, the books of our New Testament were put together, and canonised for all time. As usual, the lead in this crystallising process was taken by Rome, while Alexandria continued long to be more liberal in admitting to church reading any work which seemed to possess the spirit of the Master.

Only a thoroughly uncritical age could hope to base a rule of faith which should be generally binding on the infallibility of Scripture. The Bible is less fitted to be thus used than perhaps any other sacred book. Mohammedans have in the Koran a book written at one period of time, the text of which was

settled once for all by the direct authority of the Khalif; it is therefore very well suited to serve as a standard of appeal. But the Bible is beyond all books composite: written at intervals over a period of a thousand years by men differing utterly from one another in circumstance, in disposition, in intention. Even the New Testament, though the work of one age, exhibits in its various books entirely different schools of religious thought, though dominated by the mighty influence of the Founder of Christianity. In dealing with the Bible only two alternatives are possible: either the whole was verbally and literally inspired, so that the writers of the various books were merely the amanuenses writing at the dictation of the Divine Spirit, or else literary and historic criticism must be called in and granted a fair field, be the consequences what they may. Of course the educated world has long ago made up its mind to adopt the second of the two alternatives. There is no longer any need to discuss the question whether the Bible is infallible in questions of scientific fact or even in questions of history. But a great part of the Christian world is somewhat inconsistently prepared to maintain the infallibility of Scripture in the matters of faith and morals.

Yet, if it be true, as is now generally allowed by reasonable theologians, that the revelation of the Old Testament is progressive, then it at once follows that the more archaic and undeveloped parts of it will contain many things which are set aside by the spiritual growth of the human race. Teaching which in the infancy of the race might correspond to the best ideals then current, would be naturally superseded at a later time. This is precisely what happened among the Greeks. The myths which it was a part of piety to accept in the Homeric age were a scandal to the more advanced ethical feelings of the men of the fifth century. Later philosophers made allegories of these tales, and saved their morality by taking them not in their original meaning, but in some fancy sense. And from the days before Philo onwards many theologians, both Jewish and Christian, have been busy in devising such non-natural interpretations of early Jewish tales. This is a stage through which sacred books naturally pass, as they are left behind by ethical progress.

Possibly some people may hold that although the Jewish Scriptures cannot claim infallibility, yet such infallibility as regards faith and morals may rest with the Scriptures of the New Testament. But every reasonable person must see that precisely the same principles of historical and literary criticism which reveal imperfections in the history and ethics of the Old Testament will reveal defects, though of a less striking kind, in the history and ethics of the New Testament. Dr. Driver, in his recent able *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*,<sup>1</sup> after pointing out that it is impossible to deny that we find in the Old Testament history modified by tradition and by the literary habits of the writers, adds, "It is to be pointed out that the records of the New Testament were produced under very different historical conditions; the circumstances are such as to forbid the supposition that the facts of our Lord's life on which the fundamental truths of Christianity depend can have been a growth of mere tradition, or are anything else than strictly historical." Of course different circumstances of production in the two cases are precisely a plea to which the tribunal of criticism will allow the greatest weight. But we observe that Dr. Driver asserts that criticism is and must be the final court of appeal in the matter. His weighty and earnest words go to the root of the matter: "It is impossible to doubt that the main conclusions of critics with reference to the Old Testament rest upon reasonings, the cogency of which cannot be denied without denying the ordinary principles by which history is judged and evidence estimated. Nor can it be doubted that the same conclusions, upon any neutral field of investigation, would have been accepted without hesitation by all conversant with the subject: they are only opposed in the present instance by some theologians because they are supposed to conflict with the requirements of the Christian faith. But the history of astronomy, geology, and more recently of biology, supplies a warning that the conclusions which satisfy the common unbiassed and unsophisticated reason of mankind prevail in the end." We have but to substitute in this passage the words *New Testament* for *Old Testament* to have an excellent

<sup>1</sup> P. xvii.

assertion of the true principle; in fact the principle, if good in the one case, must be equally good in the other. No doubt the criticism of the New Testament is in a less forward and steady condition than that of the Old. Yet propositions such as that the author of the Fourth Gospel composes speeches for his Master, or that the Lucean and the Johannine accounts of the last days of the Founder are not to be reconciled, "cannot be denied without denying the ordinary principles by which history is judged," and are only opposed "by some theologians because they are supposed to conflict with the requirements of the Christian faith." Those whose Christian faith is built on a belief in the historical trustworthiness of the miracles rest on a foundation of precisely the same kind as that of the theologian who should accept in deference to the book of Genesis a geocentric system of astronomy. All compromises are unavailing: we must have either verbal inspiration or scientific criticism with its results, whatever they may be.

But though the doctrine of Biblical infallibility be unmaintainable, yet the facts upon which it was based remain. That the Scriptures are in relation to conduct and faith inspired and sources of inspiration is matter not of argument but of experience. What intellectual objective meaning may attach to the word inspired we shall consider presently. In the meantime we must briefly speak of the personal inspiration to individuals of Scripture.

The doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture is, then, like other doctrines, essentially the statement in objective form of a strong subjective feeling, which is the result of spiritual experience and of the facts of conduct. Generation after generation have found that it is by coming to the Bible that conduct is raised and inspired. "As long as the world lasts," writes Matthew Arnold,<sup>1</sup> "all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as to the people who have had the sense of righteousness most glowing and strongest; and in hearing and reading the words Israel has uttered for us, carers for conduct will find a glow and a force they could find nowhere else. As well imagine a man with a sense for sculpture not cultivating it by the help of the

<sup>1</sup> *Literature and Dogma*, ch. i. sec. 5.



remains of Greek art, or a man with a sense for poetry not cultivating it by the help of Homer and Shakespeare, as a man with a sense for conduct not cultivating it by the help of the Bible! And this sense, in the satisfying of which we come naturally to the Bible, is a sense which the generality of men have far more decidedly than they have the sense for art or for science." There is a consonance between passages of Scripture and the spiritual nature of man. It is a matter of history and of daily experience that those who read Scripture in order to gain light and to acquire impulse in religion are not disappointed. As a man's heart answers to the heart of a friend, or as the string of a harp responds when the corresponding string in another harp is struck, so the fibres of man's spiritual nature answer to the appeal of Scripture. Very often the passage which causes the vibration is one possessing the least of outward authority, a verse of an anonymous psalm, or a passage which the critics condemn as an interpolation; it matters not. The result is a fact which no criticism can explain away.

One of the most interesting and the most usual of phenomena in the lives of great religious leaders and teachers is the way in which, in the great crises of their lives, passages of Scripture come into their minds, to solve a doubt, to inspire conduct, or prompt to a higher line of action. In the lives of the earliest Christians, as reported in the New Testament, these sudden inspirations take the form rather of a direct revelation of the Master, "My grace is sufficient for thee," or "What God hath cleansed call not thou common." But in later days, when heaven was further, the same guidance was frequently derived from passages of Scripture which suddenly came home with a new force and meaning to the conscience. Many instances of this kind might be cited from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Or we may find them in the lives of Wesley, Newman, and other religious leaders: indeed there can scarcely be found a life of a Christian leader in which such things have not taken place. Scripture is thus personally applied to life and to conduct, and becomes the inspired and inspiring guide into the divine paths. It is often wonderful to see with what wisdom and good sense persons neither clever

nor well educated will deal with passages of Scripture. The history of the Protestant Churches is the best proof of the power of the wisdom which works through Scripture, and in especial the history of the Independent Churches in England. Almost without external organisation they have been kept for century after century in fairly steadfast lines of doctrine and practice by the continued inspiration which has flowed from the study of Scripture. It is a phenomenon which no theorist would have anticipated and which no unreligious theory can explain; a standing memorial of the inspiration of the Bible which none can gainsay.

It is clear that those who come to the Bible for inspiration in conduct will be attracted by some parts of it more than by others. They will less care to read about the facts of the material world or perhaps even the events of history. What will attract them is the expression of emotion and of aspiration. They will examine eagerly the directions as to practical living which the Bible contains. And they will accept also with delight those statements of doctrine which are but the rendering in the intellectual sphere of the facts of emotion and of conduct. They will read and repeat not narratives but passages, not chapters but texts.

When thus read, Scripture is really translated from the past tense into the present. The reader sees a record not of a distant state of society, but of that in which he lives. The foes of the Israelites become the foes of the higher life, with whom he does daily battle. The land of Judæa is an ideal realm lying on all sides of us. The temptations, the doubts, the heroic resolves of Biblical heroes become transformed, and take the hues of the present day. If the Bible were uninspired it would not bear such translating and idealising. But because it is, generally speaking, full of the principles of eternal truth, it can be transposed from key to key, and responds to the call of the heart in all ages and under all circumstances. Indeed, this distinction holds not only in the case of religious literature, but of all literature, art, and music. Even in the presentations to sense, perception and sensation are in inverse proportion one to the other. That which we see clearly is that which does not strongly rouse the emotions. Love is blind. And in

all the arts those who can clearly criticise are not those who produce great works; nor are those who intensely enjoy at all likely to have clear and sound theoretical views. The eternal antithesis of right knowledge and free activity holds in all fields of experience. Thus from the individual and subjective point of view, a strong sense of the inspiration of Scripture is likely to be nearer to the truth than a view which combines a spirit of criticism with defective education and want of historic training.

If we regard the Christian Scriptures from the external point of view, and not merely (as we have thus far looked upon them) as means of personal help and edification, we shall find them to claim our attention in three aspects: first as the classical works of religion, second as inspired, and third as accompaniments and expressions of the life of the Christian Church in all ages. We will consider these aspects in turn.

Education must be either scientific or classical. Scientific education makes us conversant with fact and the explanation of fact. Classical education brings us into contact with what is best in the thoughts and the deeds, the writings, the art, and the institutions of past ages. The word classical has, it is to be feared, become weighted with narrow and unsatisfactory meaning. It has been applied exclusively to the literature and art of Greece and Rome, as contrasted with those of modern Europe. Classical architecture has been opposed to Gothic architecture, and classical poetry to that of the modern or romantic schools. Perhaps only in relation to music does the word classical imply what is really best. It is, however, a pity thus to misuse a word which cannot be replaced. It should stand for what is most human and most permanent in the various activities and productions of man; that which goes deep beneath the surface of human nature to the roots of our common humanity, and so must abide unsurpassed for all time.

It is because they possess this mark that the great writers of Greece, poets, historians, philosophers, are the very type of classicality. The characters of Homer are not mere Greeks, but men of all time. The parting between Hector and Andromache, the meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa, are as

fresh to-day as when they were first recited, because they are of profound human interest. When plays of Æschylus and Euripides are revived on a modern stage, in spite of all incongruities, they interest and move the hearers, because, though motive and incident may be foreign to modern ears, yet we feel the characters to be full of ideal humanity. So Thucydides, in his history of the civil and military affairs of the Greek states, makes us feel that they are only special cases of the action of permanent political forces working according to eternal law. And so the philosophy of Plato, though in many ways intensely Greek, has given birth to a hundred philosophies in all ages and in many countries. It retains its interest and vitality even into modern days. Therefore it is classical.

Thus in literature and art the models left us by Greece are classical. As regards law, Rome is the classical country; and as regards religion, especially religion regarded on the side of practice, the classical race is that of the Jews. "No people," writes Matthew Arnold, "ever felt so strongly as the people of the Old Testament, the Hebrew people, that conduct is three-fourths of our life and our largest concern. No people ever felt so strongly that succeeding, going right, hitting the mark in this great concern was *the way of peace*, the highest possible satisfaction. . . . There are, indeed, many aspects of the *not ourselves*; but Israel regarded one aspect of it only, that by which it makes for righteousness." Thus as regards religion Israel is more to be trusted than any ancient nation, is more authoritative and more classical. Of the Old Testament certain portions possess supreme importance. The writings of the later Isaiah and many of the Psalms are among the highest and noblest utterances of the religious consciousness, and must for all time be regarded as full of divine inspiration. In fact, as comets are drawn out of their course by the powerful attraction of the planets, so these writings have been drawn from their narrower purpose, and become part and parcel of the Christian religion.

It is usual among Christians to regard the later chapters of Isaiah as a literal prophecy of the events of the life of Jesus and of his suffering. But such a view of them only partially

brings out their deeper meaning. To apply to Jesus Christ in his earthly life such phrases as "He shall not cry nor lift up, neither shall his voice be heard in the streets," and "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him," is to do our Master an infinite injustice. He did make his voice heard in the streets, and we cannot doubt that there was visible not only in his words and character, but even in his person, the beauty of a divine nature. Regarded as literal prophecy of the future, the words of Isaiah are frequently inappropriate, even although our accounts of the life of Jesus have certainly been modified in order to bring them nearer to the language of the Prophet.

Yet we must needs feel how profound is the connection between the words in Isaiah and the mission of Jesus. At each returning Easter-time those words serve to embody the most profound Christian feeling and belief. The connection between the Hebrew writer and the Christian Church is far deeper than can be expressed by saying that he looked forward to the same historic events on which we look back. As a matter of fact, Jewish prophecy and the life of Jesus and the faith of the Church are all alike rooted in eternal facts of the spiritual life, in divine ideas which appear upon earth, now in this form and now in that. All have a certain consanguinity based upon divine parentage. Thus if we take the utterances of the Prophet as an eternal hymn of self-sacrifice, we best understand them to whomsoever they were first applied in the mind of the writer. And their application is not principally to the historical Jesus, though even as applied to him they have a wondrous illuminating power; but rather to the Christ that works in the Church, and that was beginning in the later ages of Judaism to dawn upon that nation which, among all nations, had the most profound sense of spiritual fact and eternal righteousness. The Prophet spoke that noble anthem of the selfless life, had he but known it, not only of the Jewish people and of their Messiah, but also of Stephen and Paul, of every Christian confessor and martyr, even of hundreds who are still alive, and whom to-morrow and to-day we shall despise and reject, because they have not outward comeliness, and because we have not eyes to see the spiritual beauty



which lies under lives of commonplace self-denial, and of wrongs silently endured for the sake of love to God and man. It is thus that the nobler parts of the Jewish Scriptures are classical in the field of religion.

But though Judæa is the classic land of religion, there can be no doubt that Protestantism in our own and other countries has gone much too far in setting Jewish religion on a pinnacle quite by itself and regarding all other nations in respect to religion much as the Jews themselves regarded them. This has not always been the view of the Christian Church. The Fourth Gospel is full of Platonism, and Aristotle was for ages regarded almost as one of the greatest doctors of the Church. It is quite impossible to tolerate the view that writings such as *Ecclesiastes* and *Solomon's Song* and *Esther* are works of high religious value, while the Platonic *Apology of Socrates* or the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius are mere profane literature. These latter embody a religion very different from that of the Jews, but one in its way as lofty, and perhaps more closely akin to modern Christianity. The best philosophic religion of Greece and Rome is classical, as well as the religion of the Jews. In the works of Plato, of Seneca, of Epictetus there is a store of ethical and spiritual wisdom not unworthy to rank as a supplement even to the teachings of the Old Testament. Let us take a single passage of Epictetus,<sup>1</sup> "When thou hast heard these words, O young man, go thy way and say to thyself, It is not Epictetus who has told me these things (for whence did he come by them?) but some kind God speaking through him. For it would never have entered into the heart of Epictetus to say these things, seeing it is not his wont to speak so to any man. Come then, let us obey God, lest God's wrath fall on us." The writer clearly claims for his utterances, which indeed fully justify such a claim, divine inspiration. There is no possibility, from the rational and critical point of view, of denying inspiration to Epictetus, while allowing it to the nameless authors of some of the books of the Bible. In old days it was possible to contrast the Bible, taken as an inspired whole, with all profane literature. But directly the critical spirit is introduced into

<sup>1</sup> *Diss.* iii. 1, 36 *seq.* Trans. Long.

the consideration of the Bible that possibility vanishes. And when we compare the inspiration of many passages in Epic-tetus, or even of some of Plato's works, notably the *Apology of Socrates*, with that of *Ecclesiastes* or *Malachi*, we cannot allow that the heathen writers stand at a disadvantage. In the Jewish religion we have, it is true, an unrivalled monitor as regards righteousness. But in the religion, I do not say of the Greeks, but of the monotheistic Greek philosophers, we have elements of respect for man as man, of a love of the divine ideas, of submission to the divine order, which are also needed for the formation of the moral world.

It is certain that the Christian society was in early times open to influence by all that was good in the Pagan world around it. The extent of this influence is well shown in Dr. Hatch's *Hibbert Lectures*. Like a growing plant Christianity absorbed the moisture of the ground and the oxygen of the air and worked them into its own substance. Precisely because it was receptive it was fit to become universal. The writings of the New Testament are thus doubly classical, since they combine what is best in the religion of Israel with some that is best in the religion of the Pagan world. It is strange that there should be a feeling abroad that in allowing the debt of St. John and St. Paul to Greek philosophy and religion we diminish the value and splendour of Christianity: for it is obviously impossible that the religion of so narrow and peculiar a race as the Jews could be fit for universal acceptance. As a matter of fact Jewish religion has attracted but a few proselytes in each age, and has never shown expansiveness and catholicity. But from the fusion of Hebrew and of Greek religion a true human faith did arise. And looking at Christianity for a moment apart from the person of Christ, we can see that the writings of the New Testament were fit to become text-books of religion, and classics for all time, because they embodied all that was best in the religions of previous ages, and of all nations.

The value of a classical standard, whether in literature or in art, cannot be over-estimated. And never could its value be greater than in our day. The vast discoveries of science have made us restless and self-confident, and disposed to think that

we are much better than our fathers, not in science only, but in morality, in religion, and in conduct. Hence a tendency strongly developed in England, perhaps still more clearly visible in America, to individualise, to trust the modern sentiment when it is opposed alike to tradition and to sound reason, to follow whims and fancies when they are connected with what we admire, though they be not founded on a solid basis, or be inconsistent with the fixed relations of human society. To us, therefore, it is a priceless boon to have religious books of which the value and authority is generally conceded, books raised above the arena of ethical quarrels, and in little danger of suffering shipwreck in the conflicts of ideals. When our Christianity declines through moral corruption or weakness, we can always turn to the image of pure and lofty religion reflected in the books of the New Testament; and if we cannot revert to the type there exhibited, we can at least save ourselves from departing further from it. Again and again in the course of the Church's history has an impulse towards a purer faith come from a perusal of the Christian Scriptures. And especially in the dawn of modern history Europe witnessed at once a return to the following of nobler models in art and literature which was called the Renaissance, and a return to the nobler lines of Christian religion which was called the Reformation, the latter based entirely on fresh love and energy poured into the study of the Scriptures.

Perhaps to some readers it will seem absurd to apply the word classical, which is often used in no very lofty sense, to writings like those of the New Testament. And in particular it may seem in regard to the Founder of Christianity inadequate to say that he is the great classical authority on religion. And no doubt there is some justification for this objection, the reason being that words commonly used in matters of taste and literature are always inadequate when applied in the field of conduct. Conversely the word inspiration, which is commonly used of religious impulse, seems fanciful and overstrained when applied to any but the very noblest literature and art. It is fair to say that the Jewish Scriptures are classical; but when we come to the Epistles of St. Paul we feel that a deeper and more intense word is needed, and when we

speak of the sayings of the Founder of Christianity we need still loftier and more energetic terms. Yet if we take the word classical to mean what is true for all time and all countries, which reaches down to the roots of our common human nature, then it can be no disparagement to call the teaching even of the Sermon on the Mount classical.

The term which is usually used in reference to Scripture is, however, not *classical* but *inspired*. At bottom the two words do not mean anything inconsistent, and to the works of great poets or great artists we might apply both with equal justice. Classical is that recognised by good judges as the best that man can do; inspired is that which has in it most of the divine. But since every good gift is from above, and no man can do really well unless supported by divine aid, the two adjectives should apply to the same productions of the human spirit. But while the word classical is commonly applied to works of fancy and imagination, the word inspired is usually reserved for that which has a more direct bearing upon human life and conduct.

Those who believe in the daily and hourly inspiration of conduct can have little difficulty in believing that this inspiration may take and does constantly take the form of an impulse to write a book. But of course this inspiration may be of a higher or of a lower kind. No book can be well and nobly written save by the help of the Divine Spirit: but we easily recognise that works which directly bear upon conduct are inspired in quite another sense from works of fancy or imagination, or works of science or criticism or philosophy. The inspiration of Shakespeare is not connected with practice; whereas St. Francis, though of no noteworthy intellectual capacity, was inspired in heart and will.

Those who look on human life in the light of religious emotion will feel strongly the truth of the great saying of Marcus Aurelius, that all things are full of divine providence. Hence it is not for a moment to be fancied that any works which have had and will have so vast an influence on the life of mankind as the New Testament could come into existence without the control of Providence, which so worked that numberless generations should find there stimulus, hope, and

comfort in life and in death. And to this end the writers received inspiration of a lofty kind. Of the nature of this inspiration we can judge from an examination of the works themselves. We thus discover that it did not instruct the writers as to the facts of physical science; it did not, again, inform them after any preternatural fashion in regard to historical facts.

In reality it is far from being surprising that inspiration does not make the writers of the Gospels accurate as to fact. For this is entirely in accordance with our experience in matters of the kind. The historical writer who is scientific in his treatment and accurate in his statements of fact is seldom the writer who imparts to us wisdom in the choice of courses of conduct or a stimulus to pursue that which is best. The earnest moralist or the inspired teacher is at the opposite end of the intellectual scale from the scientific historian. Scientific history is colourless, but the history which bears upon life must be clad in the rainbow hues of imagination and of enthusiasm. We may therefore fairly say that, had the Evangelists been accurate in their reports, it would have been a miracle from the psychologic point of view.

And it is equally clear, from an examination of our Gospels, that inspiration did not in any way miraculously revive in the minds of the writers the teachings and doings of the Founder. On the contrary, indeed, we are astonished, considering how few of the deeds and the words of our Lord are recorded, that it is possible that so discrepant accounts of them can have arisen in the Church in the course of half a century. There can be no doubt that any observant and sensible man, who had received a Greek education, and yet had been a disciple of Jesus, could have written after the Crucifixion a far fuller and more accurate account of the Founder's life than any that we possess, or than the wisest of critics can ever hope now to construct. To the historical student such a work would seem of infinitely greater value than our meagre and often untrustworthy records. But perhaps we may apply in this case the saying that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. We cannot doubt that for the life of the Church through future ages, the kind of record



which we possess is better than anything more accurate or more complete. Our four Gospels, as they stand, are marvelously adapted for the future which awaited them. That they are better adapted to that future than any other kind of record could be, it is of course impossible to assert. No one could judge in such a matter who had not faculties and knowledge far greater than those of men. But we can see that our fourfold cord of story is stronger and better than a single line, giving us, as it does, infinite opportunities of comparison and induction, liberating us, as it does, from the slavery of the letter, and giving us at every point the power of escape from the temptation to bibliolatry.

Let any one consider how we should be placed if a Thucydides had given us a complete and chronologically accurate account of the life of our Founder, and that account had so superseded all others that they had become obsolete and disappeared. Then we should never have any hope of distinguishing between the words of the historian and those of his subject; the divine grace of Christ would be for ever imprisoned in an earthen vessel; pedantry would block in the very roots of our religion. As it is, by using now this Gospel and now that, we can, as with the various placings of a quadrant, make observations of the vague and far-off personality of Christ as of an unapproachable mountain.

The fact is that we may find in the production and existence of our sacred books an example of the process which, when it is observed in the world of life, is called the adaptation of organs to functions not yet developed. The wing of the bird must pass through a long course of preparation with a view to flight before it can be of use for flight to its possessor. The brain and the hand of the savage are instruments far too delicate and complicated for him to use properly: their use is gradually revealed as he rises in the scale of civilisation. So our sacred writings are adapted, not to the early Christians only, but to all time. Many things in them lay unappreciated for ages, but now are understood and valued. Many things in them are not yet understood and valued as they will be hereafter. It is not for ordinary man thus to write for times outside his experience, but only for man when specially aided

and inspired. And such is the inspiration of the New Testament. And among the numerous lives of Christ in circulation, the instinct of the Church, divinely guided, selected such as were adapted to be of greatest permanent use, and consigned the rest to oblivion. The works thus chosen were not by any miracle preserved from redaction, from interpolation and corruption, but were by God's ever-present grace propagated and preserved to be for all time a light and a guide to the faithful.

Almost the same observations will apply to the Pauline and other Epistles. The writers of them wrote in consequence of a divine impulse and with divine assistance, and the divinely-guided instinct of the Church selected these Epistles rather than others for preservation among the Christian sacred books. Yet since the Spirit of God in the Church, like the Creative Spirit in the World, acts largely, and not on the lines of human wisdom, it may be that among the lost works of the early Church are some which would seem to us of nobler and more spiritual character than some of the works which have been preserved to us. But are we, after all, adequate judges of what is expedient not merely to us, but for all time, and among all nations?

Such views as these are fatal not merely to the infallibility of the Scriptures of the New Testament, but to their establishment as an outward and final standard of appeal in matters of doctrine. These writers had no superhuman knowledge, nor any superhuman virtue. Who they were and when they wrote must remain in many cases doubtful. Critics will discuss these matters as they please, and view may succeed view and theory theory in perpetual and kaleidoscopic succession. Such questions are of no great importance in regard to conduct. These books were given by the good providence of God to the early Christian Church, and for ages served to maintain the faith and the piety of thousands.

An interesting parallel to the change of view which the Protestant Churches must sooner or later accept in regard to Scripture will be found in the change of view which they have already accepted in regard to the Apostles' Creed.

By some early Christian writers, especially in the Roman

Church, the authority of the Apostles' Creed was regarded as stronger and more decided than that of the books of the New Testament. The formula was regarded as having been composed by the Apostles in conclave, and as supported by all their combined authority. "It," writes Ambrose, "it is not even allowable to take anything from, or add anything to, the writings of one Apostle, surely we must not take from or add to the Creed, which has been handed down to us as the work of the Apostles united."<sup>1</sup> When Erasmus attacked the tradition which attached the Creed to its apostolic basis, he scandalised not only the Catholics, but even the Protestants. But in this case the power of historic criticism soon prevailed, and the Protestant communions acknowledged that the Creed must be received not on the faith of apostolic origin, but in virtue of its truth and its consonance to Scripture and reason. Yet it did not on that account lose its vogue with them, but it was retained and insisted upon by nearly all of them. In the same way the Scriptures of the New Testament, after criticism has done its worst, will remain as the most valuable teachers in the matter of belief, and the best guides in the practical life of religion.

Another instructive parallel may be instituted between the results of criticism of the Bible and the results of recent criticism of the Homeric poems. Before the days of Wolf it was supposed that a blind poet, Homer of Chios, wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in their present form. No critic now would accept such a view.<sup>2</sup> The abundant Homeric criticism of recent times has caused the poet Homer to vanish from the field of history. Nor does it seem in the least probable that critics will ever come to an agreement as to which parts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the original poems, and which parts subsequent additions. Yet the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, coming down to us thus fatherless from an unknown age, are still to educated men precisely the same inestimable treasures which they have always been. They are still regarded as inspired, in all the

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, *Apost. Glaubensbekenntniss*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Mr. Andrew Lang is destined to figure in history as the last upholder of something like the old view. Yet even Mr. Lang seems disposed to think that the *Odyssey* is not by the poet of the *Iliad*, and that some parts of the *Iliad* are interpolations, which is a practical surrender of the battle-field.

sense in which they ever were so regarded. Any reader of the poems who was not a professed scholar would make a mistake if he allowed his enjoyment of the reading of the great masterpieces to be clouded by consideration of theories of date, of country, and of author. And even scholars go on talking of "Homer," like human beings, and not, like pedants, of "the composer of the original *Achilleis*," though they may hold the most advanced views as to the composition of the *Iliad*. It is likely that the final results of criticism will be similar in case of the New Testament.

We have yet to speak of the third aspect in which the Bible, and especially the writings of the New Testament, may be regarded. Not only does criticism allow these works to be classical and to be inspired, but it also fully recognises their historical incorporation in the life of the Christian Church.

We cannot be certain as to the origin of each tale and each saying, but we can trace the working of each in the life of the Christian community. We cannot be sure whence the Evangelists derived them, but we can be sure that they were accepted by the community which continued the life of Christ after he was taken away, and that they were turned by the continual working of the Divine Spirit into a means of ethical and spiritual progress for mankind. The writers of the Bible do not speak to us from an unknown past; they come down to us on the stream of time as still in a sense living and working in the world and the Christian community. Every word of Scripture has a history beginning at the moment of its setting down and to be continued into the remote future of mankind. In this matter of course the historically educated Christian has an enormous advantage over the uneducated. In mere subjective appreciation of Scripture the uneducated are as good as others. But they have no means of testing their experience by that of other times, and so are hemmed in by a narrow limit, unless they have the good sense to be teachable at the hands of those whose historic knowledge is more complete.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

IN the Synoptists the word church, ἐκκλησία, occurs but twice. It occurs in the commission to Peter,<sup>1</sup> but in a context which certainly belongs to a time long after the Crucifixion. It also occurs in the command<sup>2</sup> addressed to the disciples that if they had a complaint against a brother they should as a last resource make complaint to the Church. As no one can suppose that Jesus in his lifetime set up an authority in his society to supersede his own rule, we must assume one of two things: either the passage is a later insertion, suggested by early Christian custom, or else, if the phrase came from the Master, he merely intended to endorse a Jewish custom by which disputes were referred to the local synagogues. The following phrase, "a heathen and a publican," is so thoroughly Jewish that the second of these views seems preferable.

The writers of the New Testament generally used the word *Ecclesia*, as it was commonly used by the Greeks around them, to signify a society meeting at stated times for a common and well-defined purpose. So the Church of Ephesus is the body of Christians who met at Ephesus for Christian worship; the Church of Laodicea is the body of the faithful who met at Laodicea; and the like. We continually hear in the *Acts* of the doings of this Church and that; we have constant reports of the news of the churches. And St. Paul himself commonly uses the word church in this sense, as when he speaks of the Churches of Galatia or Judæa or Macedonia, or of the "care of

<sup>1</sup> *Matt.* xvi. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Matt.* xviii. 17.



all the churches," though in some of the Pauline Epistles the word, as we shall see, bears another meaning.

The earliest germ of organisation which we can trace in the infant society arose quite naturally from the peculiar position and the high authority of the Apostles. These existed from the first as a nucleus. But the meaning of the term Apostle grew. St. Paul claimed to be, on the direct appointment of his Master, an Apostle, and equal to any of them. In some passages of the New Testament, as in *Revelation* xviii. 20, we see traces of the earliest division of the faithful into classes, as apostles, prophets, or preachers, and saints.<sup>1</sup> Here between the Apostles and the mass of the faithful, the saints, we have a separate class arising, of men conspicuous for gifts of preaching and for spiritual insight, who wandered from city to city to exhort and encourage the faithful. This primitive classification is familiar to the readers of *Acts* and of the Pauline Epistles. It must have resembled that of the Methodist society in its infancy. But a more solid and more durable organisation began to take form before long, starting with the presbyters, the elders or committee-men of the churches.

There were two sets of conditions which influenced the form of the early Christian communities. Both sets had been long in existence at the beginning of the Christian era. The one set was Jewish, or belonged rather to the Jews dispersed over countries other than Palestine, the Jews of the Diaspora. The other was Greek, or rather Hellenistic, adapted to the changed conditions which came over Greater Greece after Alexander the Great. The Jews who were dispersed in small colonies through the cities of Hellas and Macedon and Asia were obliged in self-defence to organise themselves, or they would have been lost amid the surrounding heathen. The centre of the local organisation was the Synagogue, where frequent meetings took place; and in connection with the Synagogue, councils of elders regulated the affairs of the communities. Such organisation was a copy of that of the Greeks and Syrians, who in the age between Alexander the Great and Roman rule had developed elaborate systems of civic government, with councils and popular assemblies, every city being

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Weizsäcker, *Apostolic Age*, i. p. 49.

in lesser matters a self-governing unit, and passing decrees which in smaller local affairs had the force of law. And the abundant associations of later Greece, called *crani* and *thiasi*, which were in character not civic but religious, which were formed in order to promote the worship of some foreign deity, imitated the cities in their organisations. They too had officials, councils, a treasurer, and funds for the support of poor members.

Thus the eastern half of the Roman Empire was at the Christian era honeycombed with small communities, all deliberating, self-governed, with superintendents, treasurers, and leaders. And so the Christian churches, as they spread over Asia and Greece and Italy, had abundant examples of organisation under their eyes. And the very terms bishop, presbyter, and deacon which were borne by the officials of the churches were among the titles already used in the civil and religious societies of the Levant.

The first beginnings of Christian organisation were thus determined beforehand. And from these beginnings the organisation proceeded, becoming less democratic and disjointed, the power of the bishop steadily increasing, and the presbyters being more clearly divided from the people, until the whole frame of the Church, with its headquarters at Rome, had become hardened and compacted, and capable of resisting even the tremendous force wielded by the Roman Empire.

The basis of later Christian organisation was the institution of the Episcopacy, coupled with a belief in apostolical succession. In the second century the power of the bishops, more especially in the Pauline churches of Asia Minor, became fixed on a solid foundation; and soon after, the bishops represented the churches in their relations to the surrounding heathen, and obedience to the bishop became the first essential of Christian self-discipline. Nothing in the whole history of the Church is more noteworthy than the way in which, almost from the first, she built an organisation out of chaos. No doubt she was greatly aided by the custom of self-government in lesser matters, which the Romans had allowed to the Greek cities of Asia; and by the familiarity of the Asiatic Greeks with the organisation of the *thiasi*. But

for the spreading and aggressive Christian society, a far more rigorous system of government was necessary than was sufficient for the local *thiasi*. And the only possibility of the organisation of the society lay in the heaping of power on the bishop. It is true that representative systems of government had arisen in later Greece, in particular the Achaean League. But Rome did not accept representative government; all government was in the hands of officers like pro-prætors and pro-consuls appointed to rule by the highest powers, and representing them to a subject population. What the Emperor was to the Roman Empire, that was Jesus Christ to his Church. And so some system had to be discovered whereby the Church should be governed by direct representatives of the Invisible Head. The system invented, doubtless by a divine inspiration, was that of apostolic succession.

In the course of the second century the Episcopal order became the basis of discipline, saving the infant society from a thousand dangers which might have been fatal: from perils arising from absurd views and unregulated enthusiasms in the Church itself, and from perils which came from the heathen society around. Unless the hand of the bishops had held the rudder, the ship of the Christian faith would have drifted at large, and become wholly unmanageable. And at quite an early period of church history, the rulers of the Roman Church, in consequence of the ascendancy of the ruling city, and the statesmanship which they displayed, had attained a predominant position among the churches, and ventured to interpose when they saw danger approaching any of their less firmly founded neighbours.

Thus it is absurd to suppose that the position gained by the bishops of Rome was the result of mere grasping ambition and worldly vanity. It was the divinely-appointed means whereby a certain unity was secured to the Church. There was a fair trial of strength for three centuries between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire, and the Church would scarcely have come off victorious, unless she had borrowed something of the organisation of the Empire, and occupied the capital. Bishop Lightfoot writes: <sup>1</sup> "Though the

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations on the Apostolic Age*, p. 209.

grounds on which the independent authority of the episcopate was at times defended may have been false and exaggerated, no reasonable objection can be taken to later forms of ecclesiastical polity because the measure of power accorded to the bishop does not remain exactly the same as in the Church of the sub-apostolic age. Nay, to many thoughtful and dispassionate minds even the gigantic power wielded by the popes during the Middle Ages will appear justifiable in itself (though they will repudiate the false pretensions on which it was founded, and the false opinions which were associated with it), since only by such a providential concentration of authority could the Church, humanly speaking, have braved the storms of those ages of anarchy and violence." It is with great satisfaction that I transcribe this passage, which expresses the acceptance by so great an authority as Dr. Lightfoot of the principle of relativity in religion.

The false pretensions and false opinions of which the writer speaks were unfortunately part and parcel of the matter. If the institution of bishops was to be defended, it must have a doctrinal basis, and history must be adapted to it. Bishop Lightfoot has shown that the doctrinal basis arose long after the spread of the institution itself. "No distinct traces of sacerdotalism are visible in the ages immediately after the Apostles."<sup>1</sup> The theory is not to be found in Ignatius, nor in Irenæus; but first in the Montanist Tertullian. The reconstruction of history in favour of Episcopacy was a long process. The *Epistles to Timothy* and *Titus* are regarded by most modern critics as not authentic. Parts at least of the Ignatian Epistles are also not genuine. The history of Episcopacy by M. Jean Réville has shown clearly to what extent the records of the early churches, notably that of Rome, had to be modified and interpreted, in order to establish a regular uninterrupted succession of bishops from the Apostles downwards. Pedigrees have at all times been very liable to interpolation and reconstruction for practical reasons. And the spiritual pedigrees of the early bishops are no exception to the rule. They belong not to actual history, but to ideal history, to history constructed in order to embody ideas.

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations*, pp. 211, 217, 219.

So far we have spoken of the Churches: we must now turn to the Church. In some of the Epistles attributed to St. Paul, especially those to the Ephesians and Colossians, we find the word church used in a new and an ideal sense. The roots of this conception go back beyond Paul to his Master and to ideas of the Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic age.

It was part of the Messianic beliefs of the Jewish race, that when their redemption came, a glorious theocracy should be set up on earth with Jerusalem for capital and centre, which should endure for ages in full lustre, and realise upon earth some of the order of heaven. Thus in *Daniel* (ii. 44) we read, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." Such was the expectation of the days of the Maccabees; and throughout the apocryphal literature of succeeding times this hope of a kingdom of God on earth recurs at every turn, and serves to console the Jewish people amid Syrian wars and under Roman oppression. In the *Book of Revelation*, the greater part of which is taken up with Jewish eschatology under a thin veneer of Christianity, we have a magnificent description of the New Jerusalem, which should come down from heaven to earth to be the fit metropolis for a divine kingdom, "having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."

The last phrase indicates clearly enough how closely the first author of the *Book of Revelation* adhered to Jewish ideals.<sup>1</sup> The political predominance of the sons of Israel is to him an essential feature of the divine kingdom. But when the Christian Messiah came, not triumphant over foreign foes, but suffering and dying, these notions of a splendid political future had to be baptized into his death, to die with him, that with him they might rise into a new and spiritual life.

Jesus did not call the society which he intended to found,

<sup>1</sup> Some of the best German authorities hold that the greater part of the book was written by a Jew, who was not even a Christian. Whether or not this was the case, it is certain that much of the work shows no trace of Christian teaching.



and did found, the Church, but the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God." Into the sense in which these phrases were used, we cannot here enter.<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the Founder of Christianity intended to establish a theocracy on earth. And as a matter of history the result of his life and death was the establishment of a theocracy. But how little the organisation which came into existence corresponded to the teaching of the historic Jesus, we can see by turning to his words cited by Matthew, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whoso will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." If Jesus uttered these words, they prove conclusively that at the time he did not think of an organised and hierarchic church. This is the regular course of history. In exactly the same way St. Francis called the heads in his community "servants," but the Franciscan "servant-general" became in time the "general" of the order, and the "provincial servants" became "provincials." Amid the faults of human nature and the oppression of material surroundings no divine ideal ever takes perfect form on earth. The earthly is but a faint and blurred image of the heavenly.

In the *Revelation*, the New Jerusalem from above is spoken of as the bride of Christ. Similarly of the Christian ideal commonwealth the author of the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, who may probably be regarded as St. Paul, speaks sometimes as the earthly body of Christ, of which all true Christians are members, each in his several capacity; sometimes as the bride of Christ, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." In this matter, as in so many others, Paul, who did not see Jesus Christ in the flesh, interprets him better than his lifelong disciples. The ideal Church of Paul is the Kingdom of Heaven of which his Master speaks, the communion of those who, under the leadership of Christ, press on towards the higher life, determined to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil by the grace of God, and by full reliance on the

<sup>1</sup> Some of the most suggestive pages of *Eccle Homo* are devoted to this subject.

divine will. It has, however, been suggested, and not without reason, that some elements, at least in the Pauline doctrine of the ideal Church, may have been unconsciously taken from the Stoic notion of a fellowship, or *πολιτεία*, including all the good.

The New Jerusalem has not yet descended out of Heaven; the Bride of Christ has never yet made her abode on earth. But all through history we see a process of becoming, of partial embodiments of the ideal Church, sometimes wider and sometimes narrower, sometimes local and temporary, sometimes possessing more of the elements of duration and universality. An idea may be embodied as well in organisation as in doctrine or in art. And seen in the light of the idea, the most imperfect attempt to embody it may seem so glorious that whole communities may be able to live by it, and martyrs may be eager to die for it. And so there arose in early times the notion of a visible Catholic Church. This may be first traced, according to able theologians, in the third century. In the early Roman Creed<sup>1</sup> the phrase used is "Holy Church"; and even when the word Catholic was first introduced it implied nothing visible, but the universal church of those who believed. But at the time when our Apostles' Creed was formulated it had already acquired another force, and was applied to "the orthodox churches, which, under definite organisation, had grouped themselves round the apostolic foundations, and especially round Rome." And so the word church ceased by degrees to signify the unseen body of those united by love and faith to Jesus Christ, and came to imply a visible unity of those who held in common certain doctrines and were included in a certain organism. And Christian bishops were ready to affirm that as there had been in the ark of Noah unclean beasts, so there must be in the Church unworthy and sinful members.

Perhaps none of the working ideas which arose out of the Pauline teaching, not even the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, has had so mighty an effect in the history of Christianity as the doctrine of the visible Church. Without it Christianity could scarcely have acquired an outline hard enough to resist

<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter XI.

persecution from without and schism within. Had the Church not been strongly organised it would have been crushed by the mighty machine of the Roman Empire: would certainly never have been able to take its place in the constitution of a new order after the barbarian invasions. To us moderns it seems that with the notion of the visible Catholic Church there was mingled from the first much of materialism and much of superstition. Certainly there was built into the rising fabric a vast deal of illusion, many elements of temporary value without any eternal significance. In this case, as in a thousand other events of history, the weakness of God has been stronger than men, and the foolishness of God wiser than men. The early Church accomplished her mighty mission, and brought to the harbour, through continual storms, the ark of God.

The Church of which Paul speaks as the bride of Christ, the body of Christ on earth, must not be confused with any visible organisation. That in days before the Reformation it should have been so confused, even by the greatest Christian teachers, cannot surprise us. Even then there were in the East great Christian churches which, as well as the Church centring about Rome, belonged to the body of Christ; but horizons were narrow and travelling rare, so that it was not strange that in all Western Europe the Roman Church was regarded as the one body inspired by the Holy Spirit, and holding the keys of all Christian tradition and belief. And we can well sympathise with the noble priests and laymen, crusaders and monks, who felt themselves bound to put their lives in peril and to sacrifice everything in the cause of unity, that the robe of Christ might not be divided, and the bride of Christ might not suffer injury.

Something of the same passion for the Roman Church may well survive in countries such as Spain, where the right of the Roman Church has seldom seriously been called in question, except by those who have rejected Christianity. But members of the Teutonic races at least are obliged by the facts of history to take quite a different view. They may adhere to Catholic doctrine and organisation, may regret the course taken by the Reformation, or even regret its occurrence, but

they cannot, without wilful blindness, deny that true followers of Christ may be found outside the bounds of their own communion. They must allow that the earthly body of Christ extends beyond the limits of the Roman Catholic Church, or even of any Episcopal communion.

In fact, since the Reformation it has become a sheer impossibility to define the limits of the visible Church. It is a mere question of opinion, of definition, of the use of words. Before that time the word excommunication had a definite meaning; now it has little, except for those who retain the pre-Reformation point of view. Christians can no longer be distinguished by obvious external marks.

But the invisible and ideal Church remains what it was in the days of Paul, the body which is inspired by the spirit of Christ, and which continues his work in the world; it is still the bride of Christ, which he loves as himself, and for which he died; it is still the heavenly Jerusalem descending out of Heaven from God; and its membership is open to every believer, whether he be credulous or sceptical, whether he trusts to prayer or to faith or to active service, whether he relies upon the sacraments or regards them as of secondary importance.

Of course the Roman, and in a less decided way the Anglican, Church is not content with a view like this, but puts forward exclusive claims. These are based partly upon reported sayings of Jesus Christ, partly upon asserted apostolic succession, partly upon the test of fruits. It would be unseemly, here at the end of my work, to attempt to discuss these claims. No one who regards the Gospels from the critical point of view can attach much value to the Roman citation of detached texts. And apostolic succession cannot be maintained as fact of objective history. The test of fruits is more legitimate, and there can be little doubt that by this test the Catholic claims will be in the long run accepted or rejected by the modern world.

There is, however, another important appeal, the appeal to the continued history of the Christian Church. But this lies open, not to any branch of the Church in particular, but to all branches. If we use the phrase Christian Church

in a wide sense, as including all who are conscientious followers of Christ, then we shall see the true nature of the appeal to history, which lies open to all Christians. Just as the Americans can claim as their own the struggle for the Great Charter, the glorious rise of parliamentary government, Poitiers and Agincourt, so we can all claim a share in our spiritual ancestry, and its noble deeds backward through the ages. Romanist and Anglican have no more right to deny the affiliation of the Puritans to Augustine and Paul than has the Romanist to deny to the Anglican relationship to Anselm and Becket, or the Puritan to deny to the Romanist legitimate descent from the Apostles. All the branches join the same stem, and the sap which has built them all up has come from a common root through the same channels, though one branch may bear more leaves, and another more flowers, and a third more fruit.

The development of the Christian Church began on the day when its Founder attracted his first disciple, and it has gone on until this moment without interruption, though of course not without crises. Not at any period has the Church been either infallible or perfectly virtuous, but it has been better at some times than others; it has had its times of growth and its times of decay, its renewals of inspiration and its subjections to sinister influences. Sometimes it has had the appearance of external unity, though the internal unity has never been complete. Sometimes the external form has been manifold, never so manifold as in our own day, but in such times perhaps the internal diversity is not greater than before. But never has the Founder's spirit been extinct. This is a marvellous fact: a fact which makes the Christian Church an unique phenomenon in history, with the single exception of Islam. And the history of the Church is a record of the rise and spread of ideas. Not of course that the ideas which it embodies entirely change in successive ages. Many of them have been working uninterruptedly from the beginning until now. But they change their order and their aspect, adapting themselves to new surroundings, and showing new sides of their inner life. The species persists, but it is so changed with changing circumstance as to be scarcely recognisable.



Of course ideas must come through a personal channel, and just as the lightning first strikes all the highest spires and pinnacles, so the ideas come first to those who are in the moral sphere most exalted. In the Christian Church they have come, not to prince-bishops nor to cardinals, but to the monk in his cell, the friar in his labour, the doctor in his cloister. And from those they have been adopted by bishop and pope and leader who had the power of spreading them amongst men. The bulk of mankind are never in any age fit to be more than recipients at second hand of ideas. And although the sacred books of Christianity have often been the source of ideas, they have not independently originated them: it does not lie with the dead words of books to originate ideas, but with the spirit which inspired them.

It is the case with Christianity, as with all other organisms, that the present condition is in the main a corollary of the past history. In our own day the ideas which have been developing through ages are still contending for the mastery. Neither Origen nor Tertullian is dead, neither St. Francis nor Luther has passed away or departed from the Church. They, or the ideas which they embodied, still serve to array hostile camps, or to stimulate missionary energy. The churches and parties of the present continue the schools and sects of the past, and carry on the eternal inner motion without which Christianity would soon become a "fen of stagnant waters." Each party consciously or unconsciously works at its mission of preserving some fragment or side of a great truth. And only He who overlooks the whole field can see which party is at any moment most in the right or supporting the most important cause. We can often see this in the far-distant past of history; though we can judge by scarcely any test but that of success. But as regards the present none of us can judge, just as none of us can secure success. We are like the common soldiers of a battle, who see clearly an enemy here and there, and in the performance of a duty must slay him, but have no means of judging how the day is going, or with whom the final credit of winning the victory will rest.

And in the same way it goes on in the microcosm of the individual life. We are born not merely into the Church but

into a particular section of the Church, as leaves of a tree spring not from the trunk but from one particular branch. We are born Athanasians or Arians, Augustinians or Pelagians, Lutherans or Calvinists.

It is our business as reasonable creatures to discern the intimations of the divine impulse within us, and to distinguish them from the mere urgings of vanity and selfishness; to perceive the ends to which they tend, and to try with all the powers of our nature to attain those ends. Similarly it is our business, by applying reason to history, to discern the origin and meaning of the inherited tendencies which run in our blood, and to find out the way to adapt those tendencies to changed conditions of society. Of course all tendencies are not alike good, and reason would be given to us to little purpose if it did not in some degree help us to determine their relative worth and their comparative importance. But in this, as in all other investigations which bear upon conduct, it is the active faculties which must school and impel the reason, and not the reason which must dictate to the active faculties.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE CORPORATE CONSCIENCE

WE have now reached the end of our task, having examined in as much detail as space permitted the main theses of the early Christian creed. Another chapter is added in order to meet an objection which is sure to be made to the course and tendency of the present work. It is sure to be said that its tendency is too individualist, that it makes small account of the relations of men to the society in which they dwell and the race of which they are members. And as there is in the intellectual atmosphere a great deal of collectivism, a general striving to reach forward from the individual to the social way of regarding religion, this objection may weigh heavily with many readers. It seems therefore necessary to treat very briefly of the religious relations between the individual and the society. If I am weak on that side, it is desirable that the weakness should be clearly seen and not merely inferred from omissions.

Readers must, however, bear in mind that my subject is doctrine, not organisation or discipline. The question of the place of authority in religion is a vast one: I am here concerned only with authority in relation to belief and doctrine.

In these days we hear a great deal as to the opposition between the individual and the social point of view, in political economy, in ethics, and in religion. To call a view individualist is with many people to reject it as worthless and out of date. The truth is that the individual and the social standpoint are both necessary, as complementary the one

of the other. The one is based on the facts of individual consciousness and conduct, the other on the facts of social life. It is utterly impossible that in any time or country one should prevail exclusively and the other disappear. But in some ages the one and in some the other has wider vogue, and seems more in the line of progress. Since the French Revolution, and even since the Reformation, individualist politics and ethics have in England and America become more and more prevalent. We now see the beginnings of a strong reaction, which may last long and go far. But to suppose that the return to the social point of view will make the individual point of view superfluous or dangerous is an absurdity.

Even the religion which is supposed to leave least scope for individual freedom, that of the Church of Rome, fully allows the authority of the private conscience. "Our great internal teacher of religion," writes Cardinal Newman,<sup>1</sup> "is our conscience. Conscience is a personal guide, and I use it because I must use myself; I am as little able to think by any mind but my own as to breathe with another's lungs. Conscience is nearer to me than any other means of knowledge. And as it is given to me, so also it is given to others; and being carried about by every individual in his own breast, and requiring nothing besides itself, it is thus adapted for the communication, to each separately, of that knowledge which is most momentous to him individually."

Cardinal Newman then, representing one side of the Roman Church, would seem in the last result to preach individualism, that it is the first duty of each of us to be true to the voice within, to save his own soul. And the same view is expressed by one of the best representatives of modern Anglicanism, the late Dean Church, who has maintained that the end of life is the formation of character, rather than the production of any visible results in the world. And in fact all this, and far more than all this, is comprised by the Founder of Christianity in one of his most pregnant sayings, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."<sup>2</sup> Here we touch, as

<sup>1</sup> *Grammar of Assent*, ed. 3, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> It is commonly thought that the rendering *among you* is more correct; but the English revisers retain *within you*.

Matthew Arnold has well said, the great "secret of Jesus," and the root of the power which Christianity has exercised in the world. Truly, if we glance at the history of the faith of Christ in past ages, we need not fear that the motive power of individualist religion will fail or prove incapable of dominating conduct in the future as it has dominated it in the past.

Yet though religion is based on the conscience, and without conscience there could be no religion, religion is by no means a purely individual matter. If it were, any systematic, any scientific treatment of religion would be impossible. Individual religion has satisfied many a keen and earnest Christian. It has led many and many fine natures through a good life to a fair death. To any religion of mere convention or tradition it is as superior as light is to darkness. Yet on many sides it is weak and unsatisfying. Probably few, even of those in whom the voice of conscience is clearest and strongest, can pass through life without needing another and more outward monitor and comforter. In times of illness or of depression the perception of the inner voice often grows weak and the temper despondent, and a longing comes to see duty objectively rather than merely to feel it. Feelings come and go; and a strong and consistent life should rest on some more outward and permanent basis. For comparison we may take the facts of physical exercise. In any kind of exercise the muscles and nerves of the body are brought into play, and it is this which makes the goodness of athletics. Yet merely to ply these nerves and muscles with the help of ropes and levers, pursuing no outward purpose, would lead to a hypochondriac state, which could not be consistent with real vigour. We need the outward mark, the visible feat, before we can lose ourselves in the sport.

And further, as for really healthy physical exercise the presence of friends and competitors is necessary, so religion cannot satisfy unless it has a social side. We need to talk of our purposes in life to others, to stimulate them and be stimulated by them. We need common worship, common rites and ceremonies, common doctrines. If religion be a secret between the soul and its Maker, it cannot be communicated to others, can do no work in the world, is cut off from



all the sweet offices of friendship and charity, without which life is dull and a continual strain. Healthy religion will be making terms with science, throwing fresh lights on history, inspiring poetry and art, forming a basis for social union, stimulating to enterprises of philanthropy, inaugurating schemes of missionary zeal. It will meet us at every turn in the path of life, and not merely hover in the background of consciousness.

Among the forces which tend to the enlargement of personal belief, an important place must be assigned to mere conservative feeling. In less stirring times there has been no great need to insist on the value of traditional religion. The power of tradition in the blood is quite strong enough, often indeed is so powerful as to make progress but slow and doubtful, and to prevent the intrusion of new ideas. But in our great cities, where dwell multitudes cut off from all tradition and from the daily influences which act like sea and air and earth, multitudes engaged in a never-ceasing struggle for existence, it is evident that the forces of dissolution will have enormous advantage, and ethical aberrations will be great and frequent. In such places almost any external test of religion is better than none; nor must we criticise with undue severity even defective standards, provided they restrain the license of individual opinion.

But after all, it is useless ever to preach conservatism. We are all ready to allow the value of conservatism in general, but the moment any sentiment of conservatism comes in the way of what we hold to be a good movement, we immediately regard it as mere prejudice and obstruction. So it must be by the very constitution of man: else would no progress ever have been possible. It is only the languid and the indifferent who are ready to give up their best hopes and strongest impulses, because they find them opposed by a weight of conservatism. Thus, after allowing the value of conservatism, we find that little reliance can be placed on it for checking the license of individual opinion. We have to turn to external checks of a more definite and intelligible kind. We have to consider the importance to religious doctrine of external authority, whether the authority of individuals, of books, or of societies.

Let us speak of these three kinds of authority in turn. And first of persons.

The function of the religious teacher arises from the fact that some men are far more susceptible than others to spiritual experience. As some of us are longer-sighted than others, as some have a musical ear which in others is wanting, so some lie open to the influences of the higher life, while the mind and soul of others, whether by inherited tendency or acquired habit, are partially closed to them.

In another work<sup>1</sup> I have endeavoured to set forth the natural history of personal testimony and of authority in general statements which will apply to all religion, to the faith of Buddha or of Islam as well as to the various forms of faith to be found among Christians. I now propose to limit the discussion to Christianity only.

As regards the reception of religious truth on testimony there is little to be said. All Christians, except possibly here and there a Quaker or a Particularist, will agree that they have much to learn from Christian teachers and writers who were wiser and more clear-sighted than themselves. By reading religious books, in listening to wise discourse, in conversing with valued friends, we all extend the limits of the religion of experience beyond the narrow limits of our personal horizons. We may not choose to be called the disciples of any particular religious teacher, or any school of religious doctrine, yet we must needs have much to learn from the religious experiences of others. It would be taking far too favourable a view of the intellect of the great mass of mankind to suppose that they could personally work out from the facts of experience and history, each one a creed for himself. This is neither possible nor to be wished. By far the best thing for ninety-nine men out of a hundred is to find a leader worthy to be followed, and loyally to follow him, preserving some slight right of deviation here and there. And if the leader be worthy, his scheme of conduct and his creed will be closely connected together, so that those who copy the conduct will be naturally attracted by the creed.

In the second place, we have an external standard in the

<sup>1</sup> *Faith and Conduct*, chaps. xxvii., xxviii.

existence of classical and inspired books on religion, especially the Sacred Scriptures, to which we can recur to check the crude tendencies of our half-developed natures by the application of a standard made for all time and accepted by all those who in the world have been most eminent for religious feeling and noble practice. Whenever we compare our own thoughts and words and deeds with those there set forth, we cannot but feel how infinitely we fall below the level which they set up as not merely attainable but even attained.

Thirdly, we have to consider in a broad aspect the authority of the Church. This authority may act within us on our reasons, or on our social and religious feelings, or from without by an organised system. In the first aspect it is the history of the Church which will affect our beliefs, in the second and third aspects the Church as existing fact. We are not subjected, like the brutes, to the stern action of the law of the elimination of the unfit, but can look behind us and around us and cure our unfitness by the study of history, by observing the course of the world, so that we may learn what things tend to good, and what things to destruction. By reason and by imagination we learn to let the ills which happen to others save us from evil, and we learn to pursue the good, when it is not obvious at mere sight whither it will tend. The testimony of the Christian Church lies open to our inspection, and his boldness would be not merely rash but almost insane who should suppose that the ideas and principles which have for nearly two thousand years inspired the best and noblest deeds of Christendom are worthless, except of course in those cases in which the growth and spread of knowledge has artificially raised us to a higher level than that of our ancestors. Christian doctrine which has been evolved by the Church during its existence must have a real basis, though it be adulterated by the imperfect knowledge of past days with worthless elements.

In actual life it is far less from a study of history that men form their creed than from a sort of contagion working through the religious association with which they are connected. The sense of a common impulse and common aims plays a far larger part in the inner history of some men than

of others. To some an inner sense of loyalty to a visible church is an overpowering impulse; they feel that their religious life would wither and die if cut off from a constant social stimulus. Others have more power to stand alone. But even they are necessarily the stronger and the happier for feeling that their religious life is but a thread in a vast cable which draws in a particular direction.

All of the enlargements of private creed and checks upon individual aberrations of which I have as yet spoken act from within. There is also an actual control which is exerted from without, and which is especially valuable in case of those who cannot trust their own clearness of sight or impartiality of feeling. The community has its rights as well as the individual, and has the right to impose on the individual the wider standards and more generalised impulses which come of experience and of a common life. Perhaps in a society less anarchic than ours, a society which the next century may well see, this outward control may again become a reality. Once more there may be a church, and not a mere congeries of religious societies. I cannot in this work deal in a full or satisfactory way with religious organisation, but I hope to say enough to show that I do not undervalue its importance.

As men live not in isolation but as members of society, we have to do not only with an individual but also with a corporate conscience. Of this corporate conscience it is not easy to speak in language so clear and definite as that which we can use in speaking of the individual. And it may be asked to which of the various bodies to which a man belongs this conscience should be attributed. Should we speak of the common conscience of the church or of the city, of the nation or of the human race? Or have not each of these in a sense a conscience of their own? And is it not perhaps a mere metaphor to speak of a corporate conscience, seeing that a conscience like consciousness implies an individuality?

There have been times in the history of the world when such objections as these would not be raised, or would seem frivolous. To the member of a Greek city-state, or to a citizen of early Rome, the conscience of the civic life would at once and almost without a struggle overbear that of the

individual. The Spartans at Thermopylæ were not so much individuals as a part of Sparta: every Roman republican felt that he was due *non sibi sed patriæ*. And in the Middle Ages religious unity had in part taken the place of that of the state. Every member of the Catholic Church felt himself to be a part of the living body of Christ; and that whole body had within certain limits one set of ideals and purposes. But since the Reformation the social way of feeling and thinking has to a great extent passed away. It survives as patriotism among many citizens of countries like France, Italy, and Russia, who feel that the nation is in many ways a living personality, worthy of all self-sacrifice at their hands. It survives among many members of the Roman and some members of the Anglican Church, who have so strong a sense of churchmanship that they can scarcely imagine their moral and spiritual life as going on apart from the life of the religious body to which they belong.

But in modern days any such feeling of churchmanship, even any strong tie of nationality, must be in the main voluntarily accepted. Of course countries exercise over their inhabitants such discipline as is necessary to preserve outward order, but I am not speaking merely of what is thus outward but of idea and purpose. Any European can leave the citizenship of his own country for that of America without sinking in his own eyes or those of his relations. No one becomes a moral outcast if he leaves one religious community for another. Men are not born into a church as bees are born into a hive, or as men in the twelfth century were born into Christendom. So the sense of a corporate life, however strong in individuals, is of the nature of an enthusiasm consciously adopted and imposed from within rather than from without. We are individuals in the first place, members of families in the second place, members of a church only in the third or fourth place.

This state of things may be temporary, and may not be destined even to long survival. Our days have certainly seen a strong revival of the principle of nationality, which is likely to become still more potent; and on the revival of nationality will follow a sense of spiritual community which may by degrees impose itself from without upon men.



It is a sign of the extreme individualism of this age that when we look for authority of the old kind in religious matters we scarcely know where to find it. In history it is conspicuous enough. And in history it takes two forms, accordingly as the State is regarded as a spiritual authority, or as a secular body only, while the Church takes its place in matters spiritual.

In the ancient republics of Greece and Italy, as is well known, there was no clear line of division between Church and State. At Athens it was a capital offence either to introduce new cults from abroad, or to turn men away from the worship of the established deities. Under the Roman Empire those who refused to sacrifice to the deity established by the State, the reigning Emperor, were liable to be put to death. In the Middle Ages the distinction between secular and spiritual authority was gradually established, and the Church learned to rely more on the weapons of penance, interdict, and excommunication, which were properly her own; and so long as it was generally believed that she held the keys of the future life, these weapons were very effectual. But at most periods she was willing on occasion to resort to the assistance of the secular arm, and in the days of her failing power, by means of the institution of the Inquisition, she deliberately endeavoured to coerce men into orthodoxy by temporal punishments.

In countries where the connection of Church and State has been recognised, religious persecution has continued. Very recently Dissenters in England suffered from various disqualifications. To-day in Russia Nihilists and even Old Believers are liable to severe persecution for opinion. No doubt the persecution would be justified on the ground that these creeds undermine the stability of the Russian state: and it is to be observed that it was precisely on these grounds that the Roman Emperors persecuted Christianity. Of course when Church and State are closely connected, one of them cannot be attacked without injury coming to the other.

In the countries in which the Church is less closely allied to the State, notably the Catholic countries of Southern Europe, the threat of excommunication has still some terrors, because it

conveys a prospect of social exclusion. Where the Church has not power to terrify men, she calls in the aid of secular society. But after all she is powerless against the resolute man of blameless life: a Frenchman or Italian may give open expression to views of an extreme character without fear of losing his place in the service of government or in parliament, or losing the confidence and respect of his fellow-citizens.

It is easy to account for the general lack of spiritual discipline in northern Europe. The disorganised and chaotic state of belief has reduced spiritual penalties to powerlessness. If any man, not of criminal or abandoned character, is expelled from one branch of the Church he can always join another; or if he prefers to remain outside any Christian organisation he suffers nothing thereby in the eyes of society. And states in our days confine themselves in the main to the preservation of material order, and do not regard any of the current forms of belief as so anti-national or anti-social as to call for the interference of secular authority.

It is, however, certain that the present state of things is temporary. Individualism in politics and religion has reached its utmost limit; and there are on all hands indications that before long the tide will set strongly in the direction of solidarity. The freedom of the individual both in Church and State has been nursed and flattered at the cost of the general good: before long the general good must overbear the freedom of individuals. States will become more socialistic, as in fact they are becoming while we look at them. The common voice of the Christian Church, however that Church in the future may be organised, should more and more make itself heard.

So long as a state regards the maintenance of order as its main function, it will have no reason for persecuting any class of believers, unless, like the dynamitards of France, they wage war upon the property and lives of their neighbours. But when the body politic is inspired by any higher or more spiritual purpose, its toleration must needs become less broad. The persecution of the Mormons in the United States must be justified by the contention that monogamy is one of the insti-

tutions essential to a Christian or a civilised state. The expulsion of the Jews from certain provinces of Russia must be defended on the ground that the Russian people embody a certain principle of nationality, and that the development of that principle is thwarted by the presence of an alien minority who do not recognise its value. And without any interference of the State it seems to be a tendency of the white and black population in the southern part of the United States to drift apart.

It is likely that some of those who have read with sympathy thus far will be surprised, and may be displeased, to find that the principles of this book are really strongly in favour of the revival of collective control. Such is certainly the fact. So long as religious doctrine is regarded as matter of inference from certain statements of supersensual truth or certain passages of the Bible, wrong doctrine may show defective powers of reasoning, but does not seem to be connected with action, with merit, and with sin. But if religious doctrine be really the intellectual statement of principles of conduct, it at once appears to have an ethical bearing. Any church worthy of the name must define, as did the Church of old, not merely the principles of conduct to be followed by the members, but also in some degree the beliefs which they shall accept, and the rejection of which shall be followed by their expulsion from the society. The inherent weakness of societies, which, like the American Ethical Society, try to secure uniformity of conduct without common belief will become transparent. At the same time the freedom of modern thought, and the weakness which necessarily belongs to the form, the intellectual element, in doctrine, will prevent the enforcement in the future of any such elaborate system of creed as the articles of the Church of England or the Westminster Confession. Nor are future creeds likely to contain any statements as to matters properly belonging to physical science or to history.

It is a fundamental fact in regard to all living bodies that they endeavour to expel from their substance foreign matter which does not feel the same living pulse, and which hinders free growth and activity. And as beliefs embody the vital

principles which inform societies, no society is bound to tolerate within itself a belief which is fatal to the law of its being. No wise man would wish to revive religious persecution in the true sense of the word, for persecution implies belief in the possession of absolute truth combined with vindictive feeling. But the more there is of common moral and spiritual life in a community, the less will it be able to bear with patience the existence in its midst of ideas and beliefs which thwart that life. A homogeneous state might be justified by the first and deepest of all laws, the law of self-preservation, in expelling from its borders heterogeneous elements. It might well, in doing so, expel the better and retain the worse, and might in consequence suffer bitter penalties. But the crime then would lie not in expelling what was heterogeneous, but in failing to recognise its goodness and to grow like it.

In the same way any church which is really a church must possess a certain power of discipline over its members, expelling those who are obdurately hostile to its principles of action, and suspending or otherwise correcting those members who have failed in their duty towards it, but are willing to submit to the corporate control. But, of course, any such revival of discipline involves as a preliminary a revival of belief, and an outpouring of religious enthusiasm.

Certainly none of the forms of organisation at present existing in Christendom is perfect. All have profound defects: all are adapted to this or that country, this or that type of mind. None has divine right; but all have a certain right *de facto*, as evolved out of human necessities, and as meeting definite means. There is none of them which does not embody some aspect or form of the ideal church: if they ceased to do so they would lose their principle of vitality, would become mere dead bodies. Some are doubtless destined to survive and grow; others to perish. Episcopacy has a natural affinity with monarchical government; the Presbyterian and Wesleyan bodies may be compared to Republics; the Baptist and Independent Churches are more like small democracies, such as those of ancient Greece and mediæval Italy. We may consider which of them is the best for the community to which we belong; but, after all, our opinions

are worth but little, and the great test of vitality is worth more than any reasonings.

It is in ecclesiastical as in national matters. No national type is perfect, but each exhibits some virtues and some failings. We are born into one or other of these nationalities, and to that we naturally adhere, striving, it may be, to develop the excellences and to correct the defects which especially belong to it. It is easier to change one's church than one's nationality; but in the great majority of cases a man is wiser if he adheres to the church of his fathers, and tries to use such talent as he may possess somewhat to raise its level.

Any church which is to live in the future must be, like the church of the past when it was more potent, not merely the vehicle of fixed traditions, and the repository of revealed doctrine, but a commonwealth, the expression of the wills and the ideals of the multitudes who are members of it. The way in which the general will is expressed is a matter of politics. To one race monarchic, to another oligarchic, to another democratic ecclesiastical government may be most suitable. What is essential is that the voice of the Church should embody its ideas and speak the will of its members; not the passing caprices of the majority, but the deep convictions of the best.

It is clear that it is impossible in this place further to pursue the question of the revival of collective control. The question is one of politics and statesmanship, and when society is ready for the change, no doubt great ecclesiastical statesmen will arise capable of dealing with it. At present it would be mere otiose speculation to try to see further into the future. The rapid growth of such societies as the Christian Social Union shows that the process of crystallisation has begun among us, and it may be that that process is destined to proceed with a rapidity which will astonish those who regard religion as a matter quite private between the soul and its Maker.



## CHAPTER XL

### SUMMARY

As the subject of this work has been wide, and the argument somewhat complicated, it may be desirable to give here a brief summary of the course of the book, especially since, in a work like the present, an index would be almost useless.

In Chapter I. are sketched the difficulties which at present impede religious belief. In Protestant countries these difficulties arise mainly from the growth of historic criticism, which is especially fatal to received notions as regards the Bible, and necessitates a reconstruction of foundations. The only possible new foundation is religious psychology in conjunction with the history of religious ideas.

In Chapters II. III. and IV. the psychology of religious belief is briefly set forth. The basis of religion is experience, in particular the experience of sin and its removal, and of the answer to prayer. On such experiences must be based, in the first place, an intense conviction of a Power within which works for righteousness, and in the second place all assertions as to the divine attributes. By the same mental process which discloses to us other selves in the world, we reach the assertion of an objective Deity who is good, who answers prayer, and whose being includes personality.

Chapters V. and VI. dwell on the truth that religious doctrine, being thus reached through experience and not by reasoning, must not be used as a material for speculative construction. The truths of religion are not speculatively valid: their validity is universally subjective and practically objective.

Religious metaphysics leads to insoluble contradictions; yet intellectual illusion may, like other forms of illusion, lead to happiness in life. But the only religion which can be secured against scepticism is relative religion, religion as revealed to man, and as adapted to the human environment.

Chapters VII. and VIII. trace in the field of history the working of the same phenomena which previous chapters had considered in relation to individual experience. History, like conduct, reveals a Power working for righteousness. The activities of this Power we choose to designate by the phrase "divine ideas"; but it must be understood that the word "idea" here signifies a working impulse, not a mental concept. The divine ideas work first on the will, then on the intellect and æsthetic faculties, leading to desire, to doctrine, to art, and to organisation. The determination of the working ideas as good, temporary, and bad, is a matter of the utmost difficulty; we can only venture to say that ideas which lead to the destruction of society are bad, those which tend to the preservation of society must contain good elements.

Chapters IX. and X. contain the germs of those that follow. We try to trace the ways in which the ideas are intellectually embodied in the world. In primitive times they are commonly embodied in myth, myth being usually ætiological in character. Ethical impulses give rise to myths in accordance with national character, and the fittest myths survive. The myth is purely indefinite, without relation to time; as the age of myths passes away, three outgrowths take its place, related to time, past, present, and future. In relation to the past, the ideas are embodied in ethical history, into which myth passes by imperceptible gradations. In relation to the future, the ideas are embodied in prophecy, which is of quite a different character from modern scientific prediction. In relation to the present, the ideas are embodied in parable; and then in doctrine, which is a statement of relative truth in regard to the supersensual world.

With Chapter XI. we pass from the statement of general principles to the origins of Christianity. An analysis of the early Christian creed shows that it contains: (1) statements as to the life of the Founder, that is, ideal history; (2) pro-

phesies as to the future; (3) statements as to the facts of the spiritual life, or doctrine proper. We proceed to consider these articles in relation to the documents of early Christianity, in relation to pre-Christian history, and in some degree in relation to Christian experience; but not in relation to theologic construction.

Chapter XII. considers in some detail the manner of embodiment of ideas in history. We contrast history as now understood with the ideal histories of the past. Modern historic criticism is an exceedingly destructive force, and is apt to insufficiently recognise the value of the ideal element in past history. In historic construction, on the other hand, the modern doctrine of evolution is of untold value.

In Chapters XIII. and XIV. we consider the subjective elements to be allowed for in the Gospels. The tendency to build history on a doctrinal basis is not prominent in the Synoptists, but we trace on every page the results of controversy as to the Messiahship of Jesus, which tends to make the doings of the Founder correspond to prophecy. The spiritual experience of the early disciples also largely influences the Synoptic narrative. The third and fourth Gospels show considerable influence of literary style, especially of the convention universally received in historic works of introducing speeches to indicate a situation and of dialogue to emphasise teaching. Thus it is not possible to extract from the Gospels an objective life of Jesus; but his teaching as given in the Synoptists is generally authentic.

Chapter XV. dwells on the fact that, to the contemporaries of Jesus, the burning question was whether he was or was not the Messiah. He seems to have claimed the title; but to have accepted it in quite a different fashion from his contemporaries, as a call to suffering. We may find a key to his claim in the title Son of Man.

Chapters XVI. and XVII. deal briefly with the teaching of Jesus as given by the Synoptists. The key-stone of his ethics lay in the relation between the human and the divine will; thus ethics was merged in religion. The more detailed legislation of the Sermon on the Mount is partly a spiritualisation of the Mosaic law, partly a supersession of it. It is of

such a character that it can be taken literally only by small societies, but in spirit by Christians generally. The instruction as to the spiritual life is conveyed partly in a series of apparent paradoxes, which are, however, the expression of higher truth, partly by means of parables. The early Christians seem sometimes to have distorted the meaning of these parables, by interpreting them in reference to a speedy Advent: but primarily in most cases they refer to the facts of the spiritual life in the experience of individuals.

Chapters XVIII. to XX. bring us to the subject of Christian miracles, which modern thought cannot accept as objective. We must, however, distinguish between such phenomena as those of faith-healing, which abound in the Gospels and are not properly miraculous, and miracles proper, which are rare. The Petrine narrative, both in *Acts* and Gospels, has an attraction for the miraculous. In Mark's Gospel, notwithstanding, there are only three or four miracles proper, which may be explained in a variety of ways. Such events always, in popular report, attend the rise of a religion. In Chapter XIX. are considered the accounts given in Matthew and Luke of the miraculous birth. The unsatisfactory character of these tales is shown, and it is maintained that the story of the Virgin-birth is not part of the oldest Christian teaching, that it was not accepted by Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, that such tales have been told of many great leaders, and would be likely, whether true or not, to cluster round the cradle of Jesus. In Chapter XX. our accounts of the physical resurrection and ascension are in like manner put to the test, and found to be inconsistent one with another, and intertwined with false scientific views. To the spiritual presence of the Founder among his disciples we have undeniable testimony; but the tales which insist on a physical presence are unsatisfactory. The tales in regard to a physical ascension are still less acceptable. The tenets of the Virgin-birth and the resurrection of the body have been maintained by great authorities to be no part of the earliest Christian teaching, and they were rejected by the Synod of the Church of Prussia in 1846.

In Chapter XXI. the story of the descent into Hades is

considered. It is shown to be due to the influence of Greek thought of the Orphic School, an indication of the origin of the mediæval notions of Heaven and Hell.

In Chapter XXII. Christian prophecy, especially that in relation to the Second Advent, is considered. This seems to have been the result of the passing into Christianity of the Jewish beliefs in a national deliverer. The passages in the Synoptists in which Jesus foretells his own Advent are certainly largely adulterated by current Jewish thought: it is possible they may originate in parable. In the Fourth Gospel, materialist views on the subject are directly opposed. The belief in a near Advent was universal among early Christians, and of the greatest practical value; but it gradually gave way to the Greek doctrine of a supersensual heaven and a judgment of souls.

With Chapter XXIII. we reach the crisis of Christianity, which took place at the death of the Founder. The bare historic view of him needs enlarging, because of his continued presence with his disciples. These remained at Jerusalem, and became militant; and their teaching developed under what they claimed to be the direct inspiration of their Head. Into the current teaching flowed two streams, one reformed Jewish, one Greek cosmopolitan, both of which were absorbed and consecrated.

Chapter XXIV. gives a brief account of the literature of the early Church, excluding the Gospels. The character of the *Acts* in particular is examined, and the varying value of its component parts set forth.

In Chapter XXV. the mode of embodiment of the ideas in doctrine is considered. The relations between history and doctrine as parallel recipients of ideas are set forth, and examples taken from Greece and Judæa. Three examples are taken to illustrate the rise and the moralisation of doctrine, namely, the history of prayer, of purity, and of the desire of salvation. The necessity for formulating doctrine is dwelt on.

Chapter XXVI. dwells on the relations, or rather the parallelisms, between early Christian doctrine and the teaching of the Greek thiasi, societies dedicated to the worship of the imported deities of later Greece, such as Sabazius, Isis, and



Mithras. It is shown that these societies embodied principally two ideas, that of purity, ritual or moral, and that of salvation, both in the future and the present life. They were secret in character, and they appealed to the individual rather than to the city or the clan. In all these respects the Christianity of the early Church, diverging from the doctrine of the Founder, moved in the direction of the ideas of the thiasi. Direct influence of the Pagan mysteries on Christianity belongs to a later time; but from the apostolic age the ideas of the thiasi appear in Christian doctrine. To some extent a bridge was offered by the beliefs of the Hellenistic Jews.

Chapter XXVII. describes the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian doctrine. Philosophy was the intellectual atmosphere of the time, from which no writer could free himself. Remarkable parallelisms exist between the Sermon on the Mount and Paul's Epistles on the one hand, and the writings of Seneca on the other, showing not borrowing, but similar influences. Philosophy in the early Roman age had altered its character, and grown nearer to religion and mysticism. But the neglect of physical science had caused it to be weak on the side of the knowledge of phenomena; and it was perverted by an insufficient theory of the will, and a want of the recognition of the relativity of all knowledge.

Chapter XXVIII. treats of the criticism of doctrine. Our criticism is an attempt to explain existing fact, and does not bring danger to religious facts, but only to religious theories. As regards the ideas themselves, criticism has but little application; the tests are practical: that of suitability to the environment and that of survival. As regards the expression of idea in doctrine criticism is necessary, in consequence of our progress in science and psychology, especially our acceptance of evolution and our better understanding of the nature of will.

Chapter XXIX. deals with the influence exercised on Christian doctrine by the most important strain in ancient religion, the custom of sacrifice. Sacrifice is of three kinds: (1) donatory, passing upwards into Christian charity; (2) piacular, which largely moulded the Christian doctrine of redemption; (3) mystic, which greatly influenced the Christian

communion. The evolution in Christianity was not on one line, but on many parallel lines: among various Christian bodies we find both lower and higher embodiments of the original ideas.

Chapters XXX. to XXXII. deal with early Christologic doctrine. The basis of the doctrine of the Incarnation is not merely historical, but also experiential. It had pre-Christian roots both in Jewish speculation and Greek philosophy. The logos doctrine is the form it takes in Philo and John. Paul's Christologic doctrine insists on the pre-existence and the exaltation of his Master. The writer of *Hebrews* regards him as the great High Priest. Germs of more advanced doctrine exist in *Colossians*. The basis of the doctrine in all forms is a possible and actual harmony between the divine and human will. Older forms confuse will and intellect; modern forms dwell more on the perfect will of Jesus. Of the doctrine of the Atonement, the historic basis is the non-miraculous crucifixion: what is added to this comes from the experience of individuals and the Church. The doctrine starts from the piacular sacrifices of barbarians, and is developed by Isaiah into the belief that the suffering of the righteous does away the sin of the people. Paul's doctrine of Atonement twofold, historic and mystic; the former breaks down when the Fall is allowed to be non-historic. The experiential ground of the doctrine is the sense of sin and its removal by inoculation from a divine life and death. The doctrine of justification by faith is another side of the same doctrine. The doctrine of the exalted Christ is due especially to Paul. Paul, however, does not advocate prayer to Christ; but Christian experience shows that such prayer is answered. There is great danger in drawing any metaphysical conclusion from this fact: the doctrine of the exalted Christ rests not on reasoning, but directly on experience, and is closely related to the doctrine of Christian immortality.

Chapter XXXIII. criticises the supposed visible historic manifestations of the Holy Spirit, which are shown to be of legendary character. For the inward revelation of the Spirit there is abundant testimony. But the early Church soon began to adopt an exclusive and a materialist view of the

working of the Spirit: a view which may have been at the time necessary, but is now a stumbling-block. At the end of the chapter the question is briefly considered whether the doctrine of the Trinity also is not fundamentally experiential.

Chapter XXXIV. is devoted to an examination of the Christian doctrine of the future life. The belief in a future existence extremely ancient; made ethical by the Egyptians, and in the mystic religion of Greece. The Jews developed the view of a Messiah and a millennial reign on earth; the Greek philosophers held the soul to be immortal. The Founder of Christianity spoke little of the future life; his utterances as recorded are not in accord with modern popular beliefs. In the early Church the doctrine developed first in the Jewish, and later in the Greek direction. Modern beliefs as to the future life necessarily full of illusion; but psychology inculcates disbelief in death. And the vague outlines suggested by philosophy are filled out by the Christian doctrines of the divine providence and the exalted Christ.

Chapter XXXV., on baptism, starts from the purification by water among various peoples. Christianity seems to have borrowed the rite from John the Baptist, to which the early Church added the formula "into the name of Jesus Christ"; the Trinitarian formula later. The belief in the supernatural efficacy of baptism was connected with the descent of the dove at the baptism of Jesus, from which event some of the earliest Christian teachers, including apparently the Fourth Evangelist, dated their Master's exaltation. Paul had a view of his own on the subject; he raised the doctrine to a mystic level. In the orthodox Church infant baptism gradually made way, and confirmation took the place of adult baptism. The laying on of hands was a Jewish rite adopted into Christianity.

Chapter XXXVI. shows that the question of the historic origin of the Communion is surrounded by impenetrable difficulties. John speaks of the historic supper as a Paschal meal; Paul speaks of the Communion as revealed to himself. The Synoptists do not speak of any rite as founded by Jesus, nor is any rite mentioned in the *Acts*. The sacramental doctrine

as developed in the Church belonged to the Pauline or mystic circle of ideas, but became greatly materialised. The basis of the Christian Communion in experience is unassailable.

Chapter XXXVII. treats of the inspiration of Scripture. This doctrine was directly adopted from the Jews. Jesus did not attach the same veneration to the words of Scripture as did his early disciples. This veneration, both in Jews and Christians, was based on experience. It was gradually extended from the Old Testament to the New. Biblical infallibility cannot be upheld; yet it was based upon facts, as is clearly shown in the history of modern Protestantism, which translates Scripture from the past into the present. Regarding Scripture from the external and critical point of view, it claims our veneration, first as classical in religion, second as inspired, and third as the accompaniment of the life of the Church. The Gospels come to us as adapted to functions not developed at the time of their appearance. Parallels to the modern change in the view of Scripture may be found in cases of the Apostles' Creed and the Homeric poems.

Chapter XXXVIII. considers the Church. We must distinguish between the Churches, which were early organised on a plan originally Greek, and the ideal Church. The organisation was on an Episcopal basis, and was necessary in the circumstances; but it was the occasion of much perversion of history and of many sacerdotal innovations. The notion of the Catholic Church starts from the new Jerusalem of the Jews. The ideal society is called by Jesus the Kingdom of Heaven, by Paul the body or the bride of Christ; the notion of a visible Church dates from the third century. Our view is that since the Reformation it has become impossible to define the limits of the visible Church: the various religious bodies representing different sides of Christianity. The history of the Church is valuable alike to all.

Chapter XXXIX. is added to meet the possible objection that the tendency of the present work is too individualist in regard to the formation of doctrine. First the necessity of the individualist view is dwelt on, and then the enlargements which the individual point of view must receive from the testimony of the wise, from sacred scriptures, and from the

voice of the Church. It is shown that the community as well as the individual embodies beliefs and ideas, and that it has a necessary right to expel any member who is out of harmony with those ideas. Thus any great revival of religious belief must needs be accompanied by a revival of ecclesiastical discipline and the hardening of organisation.

Such has been the argument of this book. It is for the reader to judge how far the programme laid down at the beginning has been accomplished. My task has been occasionally of a constructive character, as in a few of the opening chapters, and occasionally, against my wish, of a destructive character. But it has been in the main neither the one nor the other, but critical. I have tried to clear away the accumulation of the dust of ages which lies about the foundations of the Christian Creed, and to see wherein that foundation really consists, and what kind of superstructure it is capable of supporting. To build any such superstructure is not in my plan. I conceive that many structures of Christian faith, differing by race, by historic tendency, by personal prepossession, might all justify themselves to a criticism such as I have endeavoured to develop. It is not a particular set of beliefs that I have advocated, but a particular way of founding and of regarding belief. I have tried to show that religious beliefs, like all the active principles of our lives, can only be justified when they are based on reality and experience, and can only lead to success and happiness when they are suited to their environment, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual.

The way of regarding religion which is wholly inconsistent with the views of this book is what I have called the way of absolute religion, the view that Christianity was sent into the world fully equipped and complete, supported by a series of miracles, and not to be approached by the ordinary principles of reason which we apply to other practical affairs of life. The phenomena of religion must be investigated by different faculties and on different lines from those in use in the science of the visible and tangible, but yet they must be investigated, and such investigation is the due basis for a religious creed.



Spiritual experience, I have maintained, lies at the roots of all the teaching of the Founder of Christianity. Further, spiritual experience lies at the roots of the teaching of Paul and the other founders of Christian doctrine. The spiritual experience of Christians has in all ages been the basis of their creed, so far as it has been a living faith and not a dry metaphysical construction. The Creed of to-day, if it is to be a reality for men of to-day, must also be based upon experience, such experience as has been common to Christians of past times.

Doctrine is based on experience. But the formulation of doctrine is an intellectual process, which necessarily proceeds according to the intellectual conditions of various ages, and so current doctrine is full of error and of illusion. Human history is full of inspiration, but the inspiration is adapted to the conditions of an age or, at the highest, to the permanent limitations of human nature. If at any time an authoritative creed is put forth it may for a time be an aid to faith, but must of necessity, amid changing intellectual conditions, in time become a drag upon the wheels of religion. In ages of spiritual stagnation it will be easily accepted, but the new wine of fresh inspiration cannot always with success be put into old bottles.

The value of authority in creed, as in other spheres of life, I should be the last to deny. But a creed accepted on authority is only living so far as it is made real in the experience of him who accepts it. And when there is a conflict, either in a society or an individual, between creed as handed down by authority on the one hand, and experience and testimony on the other, it is the authority which must give way.

Never, perhaps, in the course of history has there been a more instructive battle between authority on one side and evidence and reason on the other, than in the recent Dreyfus trial at Rennes. The attitude taken in regard to that trial by the whole civilised world outside France shows astonishing unanimity. The respect for fact and evidence, the contempt for the mere assertions of men in high position, seem to have spread everywhere to a degree of which few can have been

aware. To prefer authority to evidence has been universally branded as a crime and an abomination. It is true that the authority concerned in the Dreyfus case was military and not clerical. But the principle is the same: it was by a true instinct that all the strong clerical influences of France were ranged against the accused. Newinan was fond of the saying, "*securus judicat orbis terrarum*." If this saying be trustworthy, the security which comes from universal assent belongs in our age in a supreme degree to that which can be proved, to that which is based on reality, whatever may be the objections of policy, authority, or expediency.

THE END











